PAUL SIMON
"PEOPLE DON'T GET ME"

ELTON JOHN
THE LAST GOODBYE...

MOJO
Music Magazine

161 REVIEWS
NEIL YOUNG
JOHN COLTRANE
RHIANNON GIDDENS
BLAKE MILLS
& MORE

SPELLBOUND!
THE RETURN OF...
SIOUXSIE
PLUS: THE BANSHEES TELL ALL

PLUS!
THE TURTLES
JULIE BYRNE
DONOVAN
NICK LOWE
THE ANIMALS

JOHN LYDON
"I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER MY EMOTIONS"

TONY McPHEE
BY THE GROUNDHOGS

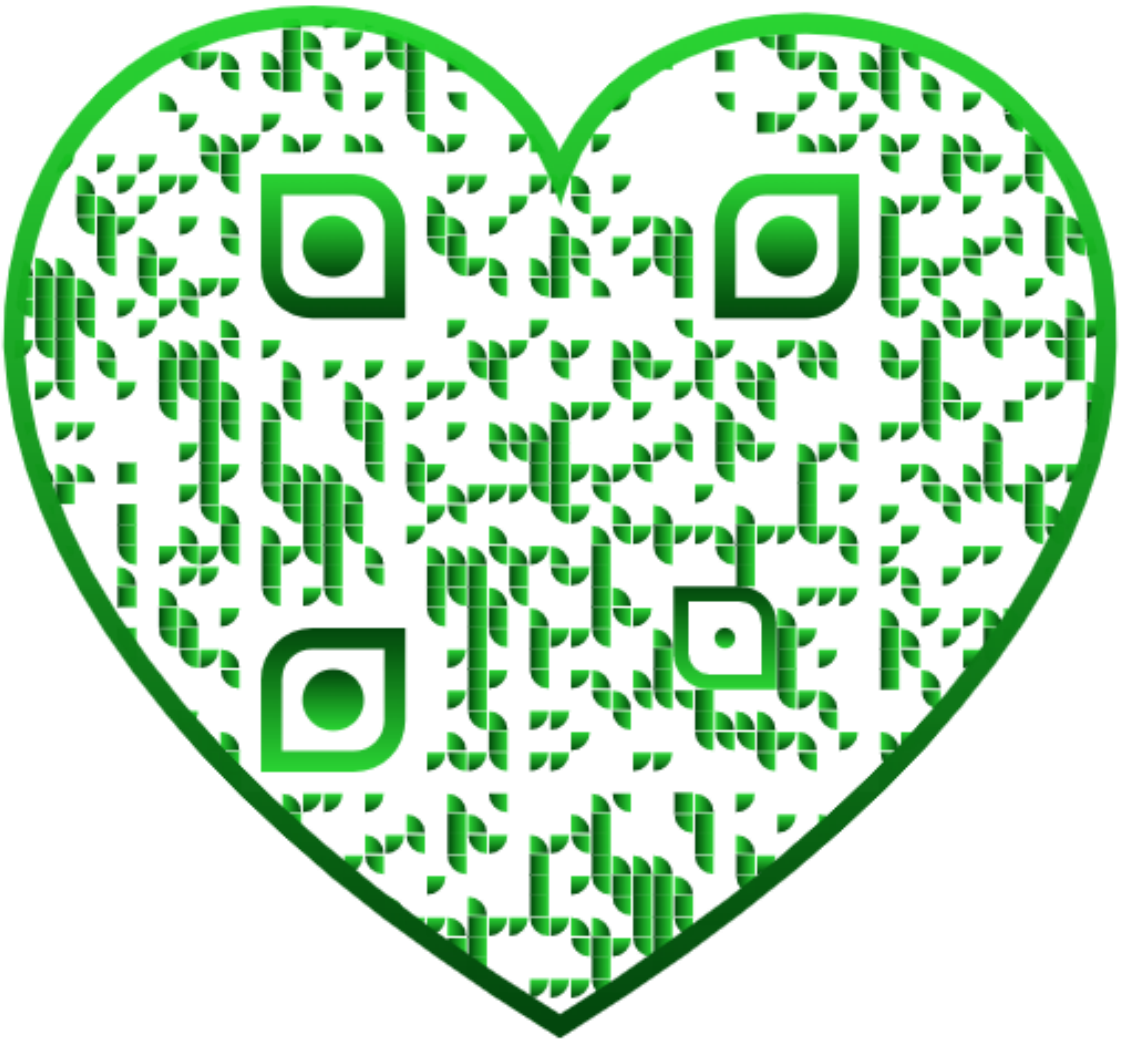
QUEEN & MOTT THE HOOPLE
ON BROADWAY!

BLUR
"LIKE BLUR, BUT MORE LIKE MEN"

SMOKEY ROBINSON
MIRACLE WORKER

SUEDE
VIOLENCE!
GRIEF!
LUST!

+ BRUCE, NEIL, LOU, RINGO, JIMI, KEITH, MUDDY AND... NILS LOFGREN!



CARGO COLLECTIVE

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD
END OF WORLD
PIL OFFICIAL 2LP / CD
The 11th PiL studio album and first in 8 years. Typical PiL, unpredictable to the last. Features Hawaii, the most personal piece of songwriting that John Lydon has ever shared.

HALF JAPANESE
JUMP INTO LOVE
FIRE RECORDS LP / CD
A meeting of minds from the world's favourite indie-alt-rock outsiders, led by the ever-effervescent Jad Fair. "Amid hard-riff jams, swinging ditties, lovelorn ballads and other gems, Jad persistently breathes life into Half Japanese" NPR

THE HOLY FAMILY
GO ZERO
ROCKET RECORDINGS LP / CD
The Holy Family return with their glorious second album 'Go Zero' – a darker and heavier take on their pagan psychedelia – if you dig anything from Can, Boredoms or Oneida, then step this way.

JESSY LANZA
LOVE HALLUCINATION
HYPERDUB LP / CD
The sound of an artist in bloom, 'Love Hallucination' is bold and immediate, from club-ready to downbeat and sultry, and Jessy Lanza's most clear and authentic production yet.

DOT ALLISON
CONSCIOUSOLOGY
SONIC CATHEDRAL LP / CD
The former One Dove singer and songwriter's new album – and first for Sonic Cathedral – is both majestic and mind-expanding. Features guitar from Andy Bell and string arrangements by Hannah Peel.

MUTOID MAN
MUTANTS
SARGENT HOUSE LP / CD
Mutoid Man, the power trio featuring vocalist/guitarist Stephen Brodsky (Cave In), drummer Ben Koller (Converge) & new bassist Jeff Matz (High On Fire) return with their first new album in 6 years & most mindboggling effort yet, Mutants.

THE CLIENTELE
I AM NOT THERE ANYMORE
MERGE RECORDS 2LP / CD
"These songs offer an uncommonly generous wealth of grace and beauty." – Uncut

HOLLIE COOK
HAPPY HOUR IN DUB
MERGE RECORDS LP / CD
A heavenly set of dub versions to pair with Hollie Cook's 2022 album Happy Hour. Including new vocal features by Josh Skints and Kiko Bun.

STEPHEN STEINBRINK
DISAPPEARING COIN
WESTERN VINYL LP
Disappearing Coin is a musical show-and-tell through a lens of vibrant pop and meticulously wrought folk, inspired by the songwriter's Buddhist studies and time spent restoring stained glass windows.

LES IMPRIMÉS
RÊVERIE
BIG CROWN LP / CD
Debut full length, Rêverie is a heartfelt, highly infectious & unique shade of Soul music. Frontman Morten Martens' delivery & production give Les Imprimés the rare quality of immediate attraction that only deepens the more you listen.

THE BUDOS BAND
FRONTIER'S EDGE
DIAMOND WEST RECORDS LP / CD
New EP by the fiery, energetic, genre-defying group. It finds them hungry, passionate & primed to charge into their next epoch. Their 1st release on Diamond West (founded by members Thomas Brenneck & Jared Tankel) after 2 decades on Daptone Records.

HOLY WAVE
FIVE OF CUPS
SUICIDE SQUEEZE LP / CD
Wanders deeper into new sonic territories. Euphoria is often found in the search.

BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA
ECHOES OF THE SOUTH
SINGLE LOCK RECORDS LP / CD
Echoes of the South's vintage gospel and soul tunes are as moving as they are timeless, transcending genre and era to touch something deep and fundamental about the human condition.

TYMON DOGG
BATTLE OF WILLS
TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS 2LP / 2CD
Tymon's history with Apple Records, Moody Blues, The Clash and Poison Girls offer few clues to the iconoclastic brilliance of this greatly-expanded Y Records masterpiece, remastered with liner notes.

THE UNDERGROUND YOUTH
NOSTALGIA'S GLASS
FUZZ CLUB LP / CD
'Nostalgia's Glass' is the eleventh album from cult Berlin group The Underground Youth. Nostalgic in both style and subject matter, it marks a return to the hazy, psychedelic post-punk of their earlier LPs.

GO BY OCEAN
CAN I COMMUNICATE WITH THE UNKNOWN?
ROYAL OAKIE CD
Produced alongside Tim Bluhm and David Glasebrook, the album finds inspiration in the down-to-earth folk rock of the 1970's, featuring members of The Mother Hips, ALO, Tea Leaf Green, and more.

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CONTENTS

LONDON ✦ MEMPHIS ✦ CHISLEHURST

SEPTEMBER 2023 ISSUE 358

"I get pleasure out of the thought that the profession I chose, songwriting, is thousands of years old."
PAUL SIMON, P42

FEATURES

26 NILS LOFGREN Serving the songs of Bruce, Neil and Lou, and carving a niche for his own music, a Swiss Army musician on how Hendrix saved him from classical accordion.

32 PUBLIC IMAGE LTD John Lydon's pain has always found an outlet in PiL, and wife Nora's recent death is the cruellest cut: "It's the deepest I think I've ever had to write."

38 JULIE BYRNE Bereavement also lies at the heart of the ethereal singer-songwriter's spellbinding new album. But so does survival: "It was an act of defiance."

42 PAUL SIMON Inspired by a mysterious dream, Simon conceived his most potent album in years. But what do Harry Partch and Davy Graham have to do with it? Over to Paul…

50 SUEDE As the '90s dawned, a pall lay over UK alt-music. How four young men in blouses, in thrall to Bowie and The Smiths, blew it away: "It was genuinely Dionysian."

56 MARK VOLMAN The larger-than-life, usually topless Zelig of '60s and '70s rock and pop on The Turtles, Zappa, Nixon, Yoko, Alice, Bowie, Bolan, drugs, lawyers and more!

62 MOTT THE HOOPLE In 1974, Mott arrived on Broadway to take America, armed with Midlands attitude, puppets and Queen. Then critical mass became gravitational collapse…

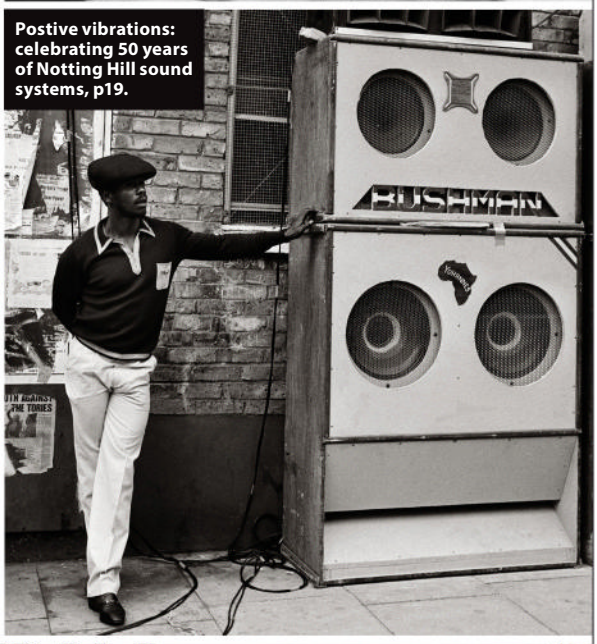
COVER STORY

66 SIOUXSIE Back on the boards and in our hearts, Siouxsie is the Comeback Queen of 2023. Writers and Banshees tell the story of post-punk's signature band and their iconic, ground-breaking singer. Just don't say the word 'goth'!

Getty

All that jazz: saluting the Montreux Jazz Festival with founder Claude Nobs and Aretha Franklin, 1971, Screen, p108.

Postive vibrations: celebrating 50 years of Notting Hill sound systems, p19.



Is the writing on the wall?: Blur, Lead Album, p80.

MOJO

REGULARS

9 **ALL BACK TO MY PLACE** Lonnie Liston Smith, Ian Anderson and Jess Williamson share their musical selections.

110 **REAL GONE** Tony McPhee, Astrud Gilberto, Cynthia Weil, Peter Brötzmann, Blackie Onassis, Teresa Taylor and more, farewell.

120 **ASK MOJO** Just who did write words for familiar instrumental songs?

122 **HELLO GOODBYE** He was asked to join with a day's notice. Then he felt he had to get back to his own career. Midge Ure remembers eight months with Thin Lizzy.

WHAT GOES ON!

12 **ELTON JOHN** As we remember last month's barnstorming, hit-packed show at Glastonbury, we ask: what's coming next from Sir Elton Hercules John?

16 **DONOVAN** The original Celtic Sunshine Superman is working on a new, secret project. "The 'next album' is always in process," he tells us mysteriously.

18 **NICK LOWE** One of the foremost songwriters in British rock, Nick Lowe gets in Confidential mood and reflects on inspirations, plus sharing a charabanc with Macca and Elvis C.

19 **NOTTING HILL SOUND SYSTEMS** It's been 50 years since the first sound systems made the people and the ground shake at the Notting Hill Carnival. DJ veteran Linett Kamala remembers the past of the form, and looks forward to its future.

20 **BOBBY RUSH** The Mississippi-born blues veteran talks musical giants he has known and how he's still being funky aged 89.

MOJO FILTER

80 **NEW ALBUMS** Blur go hand in hand through their midlife, plus Rhiannon Giddens, Blake Mills, Bettye LaVette and the Osees.

94 **REISSUES** John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy at the Village Gate, plus Sheila Chandra, Neil Young, Lewis Taylor and Tucker Zimmerman.

107 **BOOKS** Gerry Mulligan's 1950s quartets analysed, plus the history of B-sides and the dark saga of doom-metallers Electric Wizard.

108 **SCREEN** The enthralling story of Swiss institution the Montreux Jazz Festival.

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE...

John Robb

Read John's interview with Banshees bassist Steve Severin from page 74. It springs from the music writer and Membranes/Gold Blade singer's new book, The Art Of Darkness – The History Of Goth, in which Siouxsie's groundbreaking dark-energy music features prominently (as much as the Banshees hated the term 'goth').

Jon Savage

Jon was lucky enough to see the Banshees several times in 1977 and early 1978. You can read his interview with Siouxsie Sioux – covering her childhood and punk transformation – from page 70. He is currently working on a new book and the next in his series of compilations for Ace Records, covering the years 1983-5.

Mark Paytress

Mark has shared tea with Yoko at the Dakota, idiot-danced in Morocco with The Master Musicians Of Joujouka and spent two weeks immersed in Tokyo's 'Japanoise' underground scene. This month, the long-time MOJO contributor, Glam! author and Banshees biographer reports from Milan on Siouxsie's comeback.

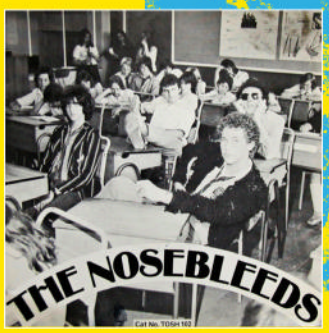
Adrian Boot/Urbanimage.tv, Borja Bonafuente Gonzalo

bonnie prince billy
keeping secrets will destroy you
the album out 11th august
Domino

MOJO PRESENTS

PUNK NUGGETS

15 RABBLE-ROUSING RARITIES... CRANK UP REALLY HIGH!



01 THE NOSEBLEEDS
AIN'T BIN TO NO MUSIC SCHOOL

Inspired by the Sex Pistols, Ed Banger & The Nosebleeds operated as a kind of Manchester scene finishing school. Note the songwriting co-credit on this 1977 debut – guitarist Vini Reilly, soon to be leading the Durutti Column. Later Nosebleeds line-ups included The Cult's Billy Duffy and one Steven Patrick Morrissey.

Written by Vincent Reilly, Eddie Garrity. Maxwood Music Ltd/Copyright Control. ℗1977 Sanctuary Records Group Ltd., a BMG company. Licensed courtesy of BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd ISRC Code GBAJE0505070

02 THE DILS
I HATE THE RICH

Another 1977 debut, this time from Californian punks The Dils. After three politically-charged singles, and gigs with The Clash and Black Flag, The Dils split in 1980, but core members Chip and Tony Kinman enjoyed a significant career through the 1980s in Rank And File, where they fused punk with country in the company of Alejandro Escovedo.

Written by Kinman, Kinman. Published by Black Impala Music (BMI) adm. ℗&©1977 Wondercap Records (What Records). http://www.wondercaprecords.com/

03 THE DISCO ZOMBIES
DRUMS OVER LONDON

Nervy, Buzzcocks-esque stuff here, courtesy of Leicester's Disco Zombies. After splitting in 1981, vocalists Andy Ross and Dave Henderson both became music journalists. Ross, who passed in 2022, co-founded Food Records and discovered Blur; Henderson went on to be Publisher of MOJO and currently compiles our monthly CDs (we made him include this, though!).

Written by Ross, Henderson. Publisher Cherry Red Songs. ℗1979 Disco Zombies ISRC Code GBBLY160-4536 Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

04 EATER
OUTSIDE VIEW

One of the earliest London punk bands, Eater were still at school when they formed in 1976, with their youngest member only 14. Headline gigs at the Roxy saw them supported by The Damned and Sham 69, and this March 1977 debut single was produced by Dave Goodman, fresh from working with the Sex Pistols.

Written by Blade/Chevette. Published by Cherry Red Songs administered by Kassner Associated Publishers Ltd. ISRC Code GBBLY9300253. ℗1977 Anagram Records Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

09 THE DODGEMS
LORD LUCAN IS MISSING

A quirky homage to the notorious Lord, who disappeared in 1974 after being suspected of murder. Lord Lucan Is Missing became the cornerstone of the Brighton band's career, championed by John Peel after it turned up on a 1978 compilation of Brighton bands. This is that 1978 version, not the faster 1980 re-recording produced by Jonathan King.

Written by Potter. Published by Copyright Administration Services Ltd. ISRC Code GBBLY7800028. ℗1978 Cherry Red Records Ltd Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

10 SLAUGHTER & THE DOGS
CRANKED UP REALLY HIGH

Another Manchester scene mainstay (Nosebleed singer Ed Banger roadied for them), Slaughter & The Dogs formed as early as 1975, originally as a glam band. Support to the Sex Pistols at that seminal Free Trade Hall gig in 1976, the shift to punk combined with glam chops paid dividends – hence the bootboy boogie of this June 1977 debut.

Written by Wayne Barrett, Michael Rossi. Maxwood Music Ltd. ℗1977 Sanctuary Records Group Ltd., a BMG company Licensed courtesy of BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd ISRC Code GBAJE0505058

11 THE TIGHTS
BAD HEARTS

If Metal Urbain launched one legendary British label, Rough Trade, this little-known bunch were the first signings to another. Cherry Red – named after a Groundhogs song – had operated as promoters in Worcestershire since 1971, but it was these local teens who inspired them to become a label. Bad Hearts is the first of two singles The Tights released in 1978, before splitting a year later.

Written by Marsden, Jacobs. Publisher Cherry Red Songs. ℗1978 Cherry Red Records Ltd ISRC Code GBBLY7800001 Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

12 THE KILLJOYS
JOHNNY WON'T GET TO HEAVEN

A familiar-sounding singer? Doing his best Johnny Rotten sneer, the Killjoys frontman is none other than Kevin Rowland, a year before he formed Dexys Midnight Runners. Formed in Birmingham in 1976, this sole single came out in 1977, before the line-up shifted to include another future Dexys mainstay, Al Archer. Also on this recording, though: Gil Weston, later of heavy metallers Girlschool.

Written by K. Rowland. Published by EMI Music Int. ℗&©1977 Damaged Goods Records/Raw Records. From *Naive* (Damaged Goods) www.DAMAGEDGOODS.co.uk

Alamy

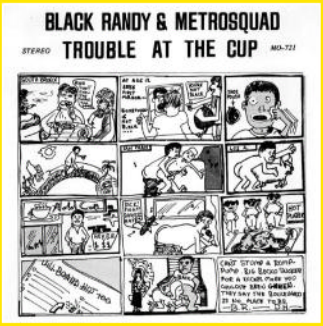
THIS MONTH IN MOJO WE CELEBRATE THE RETURNS OF PUNK'S matriarch and patriarch, Siouxsie Sioux and John Lydon, still finding new ways to surprise nearly 50 years into their startling careers. Lydon, for instance, tells us about a band who had a much bigger influence on him than the Ramones. "I thought Status Quo were purer," he says. "I loved to stick my head in the PA when Quo were [playing] live. I don't think the Ramones created quite that thriving for life."

Contrarianism. Iconoclasm. A thriving for life. All these energies run through punk's pioneers, even when a Status Quo influence isn't immediately obvious. Take the margin-walkers gathered together for this month's MOJO CD. For *Punk Nuggets*, we've ranged far and wide – from Manchester to Sydney, and many points in-between – to collect these 15 rabble-rousing rarities. Some of the artists went on to have worldwide Number 1 hits. Some launched illustrious labels. Others burned brightly but briefly, then disappeared from view. One even figures in MOJO's ranks today. But all of them embody the best of that world-changing musical explosion of the late '70s. Hey! Ho! Let's go! (Sorry, John).

05 METAL URBAIN
PARIS MAQUIS

Educated guesses might have placed the first single on Rough Trade as being by the Subway Sect or Stiff Little Fingers. In fact, it was this vituperative blast-furnace slammer by French punks Metal Urbain, who'd turned up at Rough Trade's west London shop looking for help. A radical influence on noise-rock as well as subsequent punk bands.

Written by Eric Débris, Patrick Boulanger. Published by Universal Music Publishing Group. ℗&©2021 Cleopatra Records. From *Panik!* www.cleorecs.com



06 BLACK RANDY AND THE METROSQUAD
SPERM BANK BABY

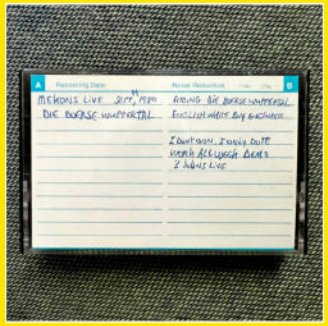
Also from the nascent LA punk scene, the drum machine-driven Sperm Bank Baby comes from the Metrosquad's 1979 LP *Pass The Dust, I Think I'm Bowie*. The robo-riffing and machine beats place it as close to Devo as hardcore punk. John 'Black Randy' Morris died in 1988.

Written by D Brown, Black Randy. Published by Dangerhouse Music. ℗1977 Dangerhouse Music. ©2016 Frontier Records. From *Pass The Dust, I Think I'm Bowie* (Dangerhouse/Frontier Records); https://frontierrecords.bandcamp.com/

07 THE FLYS
LOVE AND A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

Starting in Coventry in 1976, The Flys were among the first wave of British punk bands signed to major labels. It's easy to see why on this terrific 1978 single, an infernally catchy blend of power pop dynamics and Voidoids insouciance. Dave Freeman and Joe Hughes resurfaced in the '80s as synth-poppers The Lover Speaks.

Written by O'Connor. Published by See For Miles Music. ℗1978 Parlophone Records Ltd, a Warner Music Group Company GBAYE7800175. Licensed courtesy of Warner Music UK Ltd.



08 THE MEKONS
WORK ALL WEEK (DEMO)

While so many of their contemporaries fell swiftly by the wayside, The Mekons' unbroken career run now stretches 47 years, from their formation in the cultural hothouse of Leeds University (contemporaries included Gang Of Four and Delta 5). This urgent, clangorous demo predates the 1979 single version of Work All Week, an underrated follow-up to Never Been In A Riot and Where Were You?

Written by The Mekons. Copyright Control. Original demo recording ℗&©The Mekons, 1979.

13 PSYCHO-SURGEONS
HORIZONTAL ACTION

To Australia now, and two bands who figured in the first wave of Antipodean punks alongside the likes of The Saints, The Cheap Nasties (Kim Salmon's pre-Scientists band) and Nick Cave's Boys Next Door, who'd subsequently become The Birthday Party. Sydney's Psycho-Surgeons lasted for one brilliant single – the breakneck hardcore of Horizontal Action, from 1978 – before brothers David and Mark Taylor evolved into the rockier, Stooges-adjacent Lipstick Killers.

Written by 2 Taylors/1 Schwartz. Published by Phil Taylor Studios P/L. ℗&©1978

14 RADIO BIRDMAN
NEW RACE

Still in Sydney, where those Stooges albums were evidently in wide circulation. Radio Birdman formed as early as 1974, and had explicit ties to Motor City proto-punk in the shape of guitarist and co-founder Deniz Tek, born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The anthemic ramalam of New Race became their first single in 1977; on the flip – a cover of TV Eye.

Written by D. Tek. Published by Universal Music Publishing Pty Ltd (ASCAP). ℗&©1977 Radio Birdman. From *The Essential Radio Birdman (1974-1978)* (Sub Pop Records, 2001) https://www.subpop.com/

15 THE ELECTRIC CHAIRS
ON THE CREST

Fuck Off you'll probably know, the second single from Jayne County's trailblazing band that was recorded and released in 1977 during a London sojourn away from their home turf of New York. On The Crest, though, is the arguably superior B-side, a vibrational mash-up of ancient mythologies that notes Achilles was "hot and cold but an honest bloke".

Written by County. Publisher – Cherry Red Songs. ℗1977 Cherry Red Records Ltd ISRC Code GBBKB7820108 Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

"WE HATED THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR!"

THE EXCEPTIONAL SIOUXSIE SIOUX, PAGE 66

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NICK LOWE
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MARSHALL CRENSHAW
FIELD DAY

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Jess Williamson

INDIE-FOLK TEXAN

What music are you currently grooving to?

I am loving *Joy'all* from **Jenny Lewis** and *In The Air* from **Anna St Louis**. They are both great albums that came out the same day as my record *Time Ain't Accidental*, so it's kind of like we all share a birthday.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Ys by **Joanna Newsom**… she is my hero and that album was my introduction to her music back in 2006.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

I think it was *Jagged Little Pill* by **Alanis Morissette** or maybe *Pieces Of You* by **Jewel**. Both were in heavy rotation when I first started to buy CDs, and I probably got them at Barnes & Noble or Walmart.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Dolly Parton, of course! Ever since I was a tiny little girl, I've looked up to Dolly and wanted to be just like her. Not much has changed.

What do you sing in the shower?

Whatever is stuck in my head. Today it was **Miranda Lambert**. I love last year's *Palomino* album.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Time Of The Preacher by **Willie Nelson**. It's such a classic and reminds me of sitting on the back porch on Saturday nights at my mom's house.

And your Sunday morning record?

I love instrumental and ambient music in the mornings, and I have a super-long playlist I'm constantly adding to called Morning Pages. And my all-time favourite record to listen to on a Sunday morning is *Brossa D'Ahir* by **Pep Laguarda & Tapineria**. It is absolutely perfect Mediterranean folk music recorded in 1977 in Mallorca.

Jess Williamson's Time Ain't Accidental is out now on Mexican Summer.

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING...

Lonnie Liston Smith

ASTRAL JAZZ-FUNK TRAVELLER

What music are you currently grooving to?

Well, I guess the latest, I like that **Silk Sonic** thing, Leave The Door Open. And you know I'm always listening to **John Coltrane**.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On*. That album still fits today. It was very well-produced. With the music and the message, they did a great job.

What was the first record you ever bought and where did you buy it?

Well, the first jazz record that really *influenced* me was Just Friends on **Charlie Parker**'s *…With Strings*. I bought that when I was still in high school. I had heard it over at someone's house. I can't imagine what record store that was back then.

Nick Harrison

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I guess I would say **Miles Davis**. Miles was so cool. Not only was he a great musician, he was a great stylist clothing-wise. He had the whole thing down on- and off-stage.

What do you sing in the shower?

I just usually just hum something. It's just whatever comes out. They're original **Lonnie Liston Smith** compositions, that's what they are.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

On a Saturday night, I guess you'd be out partying so I guess you got to put on that **James Brown**. He really laid the phone down. That was definitely the Saturday night go-to. Whatever he does is really funky, because, you know, **Bootsy Collins** and all of them people came out of James Brown.

And your favourite Sunday morning record?

Duke Ellington did a great record called Come Sunday [from 1958's *Black, Brown & Beige* LP], I think he recorded it in New York and wrote it all for **Mahalia Jackson**. It was very smooth.

Jazz Is Dead 17 by Lonnie Liston Smith, Ali Shaheed Muhammad & Adrian Younge is out now.

Ian Anderson

TULL'S TITAN

What music are you currently grooving to?

I don't actually groove, as such. I quietly listen for two reasons: one, to relax when flying due to a nervous disposition. And two, when I have to play on someone else's record as a guest. Then I scrutinise it closely from a professional standpoint. I am not really a fan of pop and rock music and pretty much gave up listening in the mid-'70s. So put me down for **Handel**'s Messiah, although I immersed myself in **Morrissey** a few weeks ago. It was going fine for several trips abroad until he disgraced himself on a recent BA flight and behaved badly. In seat 1A. Doubly annoying since that's where I usually sit.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Beethoven's 9th or maybe *Eliminator* by **ZZ Top**. All depends on how much turbulence I am blotting out.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Johnny Duncan & The Bluegrass Boys, Last Train To San Fernando, when I was just 10, at the Woolworths record counter.

> "I am a quiet, introverted loner."
>
> IAN ANDERSON

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Most of the ones I love are long since dead, so forget them. Perhaps an emerging young, good-looking flautist.

What do you sing in the shower?

Never tried that so far. Too busy looking for private parts to scrub.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

If it is to suggest music to accompany some debauched revelry, then nothing comes to mind since I am a quiet, introverted loner and anyway, Saturday nights, I am usually doing a concert, in which case it would be one of my own.

And your Sunday morning record?

That's usually a time when I might record something as a guest musician. A **Marc Almond** track is coming up next. Can't give away any more!

Jethro Tull's The Seven Decades Tour begins in April 2024.

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EVEN BY RECENT STANDARDS, IT'S ALREADY been a pretty momentous summer in the UK for live shows. Bruce Springsteen And The E Street Band. Arctic Monkeys. Lana Del Rey. Pulp and Blur. An auspicious Glastonbury Festival climaxing with the final British performance by Elton John.

When festival bills were announced, though, one name at July's Latitude Festival stood out. There, lurking on the second stage line-up, was the most shocking of additions: Siouxsie Sioux, returning to the spotlight for the first time in a decade. Over those 10 years, absence has only boosted her already powerful reputation – not just as a punk trailblazer, as an unwitting progenitor of goth, but as a visionary innovator who deserves to be talked about with the same reverence as we talk about Kate Bush.

"I'm not the cartoon character that everyone would like me to be," Sioux told MOJO's Mark Paytress, and this month we present the deepest of dives into her nuanced, multi-faceted genius. Paytress travels to Milan, to re-engage with Sioux as she starts a season of live manoeuvres. Jon Savage uncovers a revelatory – and often extremely moving – interview with her from his archives. And long-serving Banshees lieutenants Steve Severin and Budgie are on hand to provide more unprecedented insights into this most mysterious of icons. "It was tricky, and fractious, and loving, and entangled," says Budgie. "And I wouldn't change a thing."

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

There are a whole lot of things I remember

First of all thanks for the excellent *Stax Uncovered!* CD included with MOJO 357. A few years back, while in Memphis from the UK, I managed to finally find a cab driver willing to take me out to McLemore and the Stax Museum – a visit that was worth every dollar spent. Back in 1967, I had seen Eddie Floyd at the Queen's Ballroom in Wolverhampton. He was backed by those legends of the tour circuit, Sounds Incorporated, and Eddie was splendid, as everyone waited for the big hit Knock On Wood. The Queen's had a rather conservative music policy for attendance in respects of male attire – collar and tie and smart trousers were the regimented requirement. It was to rebound on them sometime later, when I went to see John Mayall and he cancelled the gig because patrons were not allowed in if they wore jeans.

Charlie Brown, Cardiff

You wouldn't see a woman like that again

Great article on Joni Mitchell [MOJO 356]. Back in the day circa 1967, I used to go to a coffee shop in Detroit called the Chess Mate with an old friend of mine, Rick Zolkower. We would tell our mothers that we were sleeping over at each other's house and stay all night at the Chess Mate listening to, among others, Chuck and Joni Mitchell together, and then Joni by herself. We saw them on several occasions. Who knew?

Steven B. Blum, Farmington Hills, Michigan

You must be very proud of her new success

Shirley Collins is head and shoulders above all singers of what we call folk. The MOJO Interview [MOJO 357] was such a breath of fresh air, so dignified, so elegant, no "big I am", just a lady

surprised by her importance. The standards Shirley has set over the years have never diminished: many have followed, few have achieved. I have listened since the Harvest days, then sought everything I could find. The voice may have changed but the honesty therein has not. Why Shirley Collins is not a Dame, for the huge contributions to her craft, is beyond me. Maybe a role for MOJO, to put Shirley's name down for the gong?

Mike Knight, via e-mail

Music changes so much, doesn't it?

Thank you for your excellent piece on Willy DeVille [MOJO 356]. The article described Mink DeVille similar to how I remember them – Springsteen, appearing in West Side Story, whilst listening to The Ronettes. I bought their first couple of albums and they've stood the test of time. It was interesting to read that he hated punk. I saw them live supporting the Feelgoods, and similar to when I saw Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers support Nils Lofgren, although they were a million miles away from punk, they had the sneer, edginess and attitude that a few of the new wave acts had.

David Tags Taylor, via e-mail

…As a MOJO subscriber for over 10 years, I'd been baffled as to why you'd never covered Willy DeVille, and said you'd needed to about 20 times. Thanks for finally bringing him to light. I once talked to soulster James Hunter, and he'd never heard of him. Next: Garland Jeffreys!

Marc Antal, Chicago

There's too many people in this town with nothing else to do but talk

How pleasing to see *Gnu High* sneaking into the list of recommended Keith Jarrett recordings [MOJO 356]. The usual story of the pianist begrudgingly operating as a sideman is dragged up again, though. Rumours say he did the date as a favour to Manfred Eicher, but whatever, it is an outstanding session. The UK trumpet player Ken Wheeler acquits himself remarkably well and is no way overshadowed by his illustrious colleagues. Whatever happened to him?

Michael Steels, via e-mail

I'm just trying to explain to you how things really are

I have some factual corrections to Bill DeMain's story about the *Written In Their Soul: The Stax Songwriter Demos* box set of unreleased recordings I produced for Stax/Craft Recordings [MOJO 357]. I worked on this project for 17 years, not 14, and Stax's 50th anniversary was in 2007, not 2009. I started the project in 2005-2006 when I was an employee of Concord Music Group, but haven't worked for them since 2007. I completed this project as a consultant. These days, while I do consult, much of my work is done for the label I founded with my partners in 2010, Omnivore Recordings.

The "entire Stax tape library, including demos" was not handed over to Warner Music Group, the released assets were in fact, split along the May 1968 dividing line between the Atlantic/Warner Music Group side and the Stax/Fantasy (later Concord) side. Also, the archives in which I researched all the demo recordings was neither Warner's nor Concord's. It was the publishing assets at Rondor Music, which held the East/Memphis Music publishing where a lot of the Stax songwriters had publishing deals for their songs. The introductory linernotes I wrote for the set clearly detail the process for those interested. Ms Deanie Parker is so many wonderful things, but she's not the CEO of the Stax Museum.

Aside from those factual corrections, I appreciate the light being shone on this project and the wonderful Stax label. The cover mount CD is a terrific sampling of what awaits everyone across the seven discs. Turn it up!

Cheryl Pawelski, Los Angeles/Portland, Oregon

You can lose everything else, but you can't lose your talent

Interesting to see the collation of works from different parts of Lou Reed's career through the vehicle of a Top 50 tunes listing [MOJO 355]. One thing, in terms of listening experience, that needs to be taken into account, however, is that after *Transformer* Lou's subtle expressions and intonations were replaced with harsh barking and shouting. That it was blown-out by the inhalation of abrasive vapours was fairly widely reported at the time. For later works we are therefore reliant on his poetry, which could be variable – surely Coney Island Baby has to be seen as a crude "lashup"? However, there's no point bewailing other people's choices/favourites. I would just say: no I'm Beginning To See The Light? Really?

Dylan Bickerstaffe, via e-mail

…Just browsing MOJO 355's list of the 50 best Lou Reed songs. How, just how, is it possible you missed I Wanna Know (The Pit And The Pendulum) from *The Raven*, with The Blind Boys Of Alabama? It's a key track, where Lou bares so much about why he was the way he was. I won't tell anybody else, but this inexcusable miss means MOJO's rating goes down from 100 to 98 on my scale for this month.

Niko Kraft, via e-mail

I wonder if you can guess who I am?

Hey, aren't the quotes on MOJO 357's Theories, Rants Etc taken from the movie Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome (RIP Tina Turner, Frank Thring and Angelo Rossitto)?

Anders Z, Stockholm

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WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZARRE STORIES FROM PLANET MOJO

We have lift off: Rocket Man Elton John wows the masses, Pyramid Stage, Glastonbury, Sunday, June 25, 2023.

"Nothing I've played before comes close to Glastonbury..."

Elton John tells MOJO about his incredible farewell to touring down on Worthy Farm.

IF ELTON JOHN's headline set on the last night of Glastonbury 2023 is to prove – as he promised, or threatened – his last ever live show in the UK, it cannot be said that he didn't leave it all on the stage, or that the artist himself was knowingly underwhelmed.

"Nothing I've played before comes close to Glastonbury in terms of size and scale," the singer told MOJO in its aftermath. "Playing Paris Arena two nights later was like playing in a nightclub by comparison."

He's a man of excitable pronouncements, but he wasn't exaggerating. Within hours of the show's conclusion, his set was declared, with 7.3 million viewers, the most watched performance ever in the history of the BBC's broadcast coverage of the festival. The Pyramid arena itself was full beyond capacity – an unprecedented proportion of the festival's 210,000-plus attendees drawn by the promise of the music, but also the drama of the narrative. With respect to the day's other headliners – including Queens Of The Stone Age, Phoenix and Rickie Lee Jones – why would you come to Glastonbury in 2023 and *not* go and see Elton John?

Neither did he disappoint. Although the stiffness of his initial shuffle to the piano was a reminder of his 76 years, and of why he's calling a halt to live work, the opening Pinball Wizard set a standard for piano-bashing intensity and emotional resonance that amplified throughout the set. If you've ever dared reflect that John's voice may be the least of his strengths, you might also agree that there was something in the lived-in grit and soulful growl of his singing that the R&B-obsessed mid-twentysomething wannabe never quite touched. Something in abundance on this set's early highlights Are You Ready For ➢

> "The Pyramid Stage was a career highlight, and amazing to go out with a bang."
> **ELTON JOHN**

Getty, Rocket Entertainment/Ben Gibson

Bowing out in style: (from above) Elton John makes his point; specs appeal: Elton 'approved' sunglasses for sale at Glastonbury; John with trusty band members (from left) Davey Johnstone, John Mahon, Nigel Olsson and Matt Bissonette.

Rocket Entertainment/Ben Gibson, Getty, Avalon.red, Alamy

➢ Love and Sad Songs (Say So Much). The former was essayed with the help of Gabriels singer Jacob Lusk. Both were reinforced by the massed lungs of the London Community Gospel Choir. Both were crushing.

This crowd didn't need reminding of any of the words, or a lecture on the strengths of Elton John and Bernie Taupin's best songs – some of which, constrained on record by the production tics of their time, come into their own on-stage. Snobs might regard *Too Low For Zero*'s comeback hits, I'm Still Standing and I Guess That's Why They Call It The Blues, as post-canonical, but 40 years later they're undeniable cultural artefacts, passed down through generations. The crowd's appreciation roared back in waves and the singer, dabbing his eyes on more than one occasion, felt the surge.

Caveats? No solo artist of John's vintage has remained as loyal to his musicians. Drummer Nigel Olsson has been touring with the singer since 1970, percussionist Ray Cooper since 1972; guitarist Davey Johnstone began his stint with *Honky Château*. They're all, still, great players, but they're prone to their leader's tendency to gild the lily, and not every song required a flourish of tambourine. Neither did this show need its flurry of on-stage guests. John likes to signal 'contemporary', but neither Stephen Sanchez nor a cover of his song, Until I Found You, seemed to add much. Would we not rather have heard Burn Down The Mission?

It's a quibble, though. For all his showmanship, John is at his best constructing subtle melodic journeys – the way Tiny Dancer (featuring The Killers' Brandon Flowers, but never mind) and Your Song build is unique – and turning Taupin's lyrics into emotionally truthful autobiography. They are the reasons he is so loved.

Rocket Man (I Think It's Going To Be A Long, Long Time) was the inevitable clincher, an opportunity to stretch out (maybe a little too far out, but…), for Davey Johnstone to make space sounds on his double-neck, and for Glastonbury to launch the obligatory fireworks to oohs and aahs. It was how legendary Glasto sets are supposed to end, but it was superfluous: what Elton John had already proved is that he doesn't need the gimmicks. He never did.

John is not planning on a full retirement just yet. With his Farewell Yellow Brick Road Tour now over, a lie-down is due. Then work will resume on a new album. MOJO spies tell us to expect star guests because John, it seems, can't help himself. But he's adamant that that's it for gigs.

"The Pyramid Stage was a career highlight," he underlined to MOJO, "and amazing to go out with a bang. I feel so privileged to have experienced it at this stage. So few people are lucky enough to get the opportunity to bow out on a high like that. It will stay with me for ever."

Danny Eccleston

"To bow out on a high like that – it will stay with me for ever."
ELTON JOHN

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Don Letts

Punk's reggae consigliere bows down to Catch A Fire by The Wailers (Island, 1973).

I was 17 and working on the King's Road at Acme Attractions, and this was one of two records being played all the time along there, the other being Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*, and what got me immediately was the sonics. I was a child of the Windrush generation so I'd grown up with reggae coming in one ear and the pop and rock my white mates were listening to in the other, and this had the heavy bass and the rock edge so it spoke to that duality of my existence which was black and British, and it signposted the rebel dread in me. The Wailers didn't live in a bubble, they were open to all music, I liked that.

Then there were the lyrics. They translated perfectly to the streets of Brixton which I was growing up on – Concrete Jungle, No More Trouble, 400 Years, they spoke volumes to this black British generation that were trying to work out where the fuck they fitted in. But it ain't all revolutionary. It reflects the duality of Bob as a person, on the one hand the rudeboy, raggamuffin, seditionary, then Kinky Reggae, Stir It Up and Midnight Ravers show the more spiritual, conscious lovers side. He wasn't one dimensional, he was a complex brother. Around its release they did that legendary performance on the Old Grey Whistle Test and that had the same impact on black people that the New York Dolls performance on there had on my white mates.

When Bob was in London [in 1977], he came in Acme, we got to know each other and I used to sell him weed – I wasn't a dealer but it was a way to get through his front door. The last time I saw him, we had an argument about punk rock, I was wearing bondage trousers and he took the piss. But I stood my ground, said he was wrong. Three months later he was tuned in and wrote Punky Reggae Party. I got the last laugh.

As told to Lois Wilson

Don Letts's Outta Sync is out in September on Cooking Vinyl.

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Gael-house rock: Donovan, still not sticking to any single musical style.

CELTIC BEATNIK DONOVAN PREPARES A SOUNDTRACK

WHEN MOJO calls Donovan on one of the scorching days of June, we're bound to mention that our office is a short hop away from (a very) Sunny Goodge Street, the road he immortalised in hashish-inspired song in late 1965, just six months before he became the victim of rock's first high-profile pot bust.

"Now that's *good*," he says down the line from home in County Cork. "Sunny Goodge Street was a very, very early beginning of my interest, or let's just say my tradition, about Gaelic things – the myths and legends and storytelling, and all of those wonderful things."

Gaelia, the Glasgow-born musician's Dave Gilmour-guesting 28th album, released last December, was also steeped in the Celtic world – as is his next project. "It's a development of *Gaelia*," he says, "a homemade documentary – not financed by Netflix or the BBC – which I've been working on for some time with my grandson Sebastian. It will be illustrated with music, and that music will be the soundtrack. I'm working on it here and I'm going to drop down to Majorca with [wife] Linda, there'll be a few parts of it that develop there. I'm narrating quite a lot of it, that's a big part of it. I think they call it spoken word."

The film, he says, will concern "the full impact of Gaelic artists' artistry – of poetry, music, theatre, and radical thought. The focus is on many of these artists that came [to America] from Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Popular culture was cooked up in America and spread around the world – from country music to rockabilly, which, mixed with extraordinary elements of, obviously, black music from Africa, became rock'n'roll."

He's also reluctant to share too many details of this new endeavour ("I can't tell you the title of it!"). Yet he does allow a glimpse into his writing process.

"It's kind of a secret," he says. "The singer-songwriter that I am, what you might call from the tradition of just one voice, one guitar and one song, it kind of comes out just all fully made for me. I maybe hear a phrase, and that phrase has a sound, and I hear that sound when I pick up the guitar. That phrase may represent the whole song. Leonard Cohen once asked Dylan, 'How long does it take to write a song, Bobby?' Dylan said, 'You tell me first.' Leonard said, 'It takes three years.' Bobby said, 'Three minutes. You see, I'm a three-minute guy!'

"The 'next album' is always in process," he concludes. "From a very early stage, I said, I will speak to people about this tradition, but at the same time I will make it, shall we say, a fusion of popular song influenced by jazz and blues and folk. All those elements coming together was always fascinating to me. So – there's a few of my secrets."

Ian Harrison

> **"I hear a phrase, and it may represent the whole song."**
> **DONOVAN**

FACT SHEET

Title: TBC
Due: TBC
Songs: TBC
The Buzz: "You need to know an extraordinary amount of styles and music if you want to write in all different styles. Remember this, rhythm and blues bands only stick to the rhythm and blues, Latin jazz bands stick to the Latin jazz field, country music artists stick to the country music formats. But Donovan doesn't stick to anything." *Donovan*

ALSO WORKING

…**Can** keyboardist **IRMIN SCHMIDT** is working on a new album with long-time engineer **René Tinner**…**THE PRODIGY** play their Army Of The Ants tour in November: there's also a new album in progress. Producer **Liam Howlett** (right) explained their current modus as "full attack mode, double barrel"

…**NICK CAVE** has been taking time off answering his public's dilemmas on his Red Right Hand site, due to being in the studio, "working on songs for the new Bad Seeds record… so far, the songs are sounding great… I say this with a fair amount of caution because I won't really know until I get the Bad Seeds into the studio and we actually make the album. But it is feeling very good, very positive"…The Sun reported that **Bill Wyman** has played bass on the new **ROLLING STONES** album. "This record's really a tribute to Charlie [Watts], so he couldn't say no," explained their source, who added that Watts's drum tracks "are being repurposed and woven into the album." **Paul McCartney** and **Elton John** are also expected to appear…**BAT FOR LASHES** (right) has a new album entitled *The Dream Of Delphi*. Named for and centred around her infant daughter, she told the Southbank, "the music… was just my emotion coming through my hands and out through the musical instruments"…**MANTRA OF THE COSMOS**, a new group featuring **Shaun Ryder**, **Zak Starkey**, **Andy Bell** and **Bez**, have an album's worth of songs, including Put (The Boot In) and Beast From The East…

Getty (3)

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Trash city rocker: Nick Lowe finds the funny side in 1977.

Ian Dickson/Getty

Nick Lowe

The ace of song talks swinging quietly, touring with Wings, and the nobility of haplessness.

SEEMINGLY JOINED at the hip for nigh on 50 years, Nick Lowe – backed by Los Straitjackets – is back on a North American tour with Elvis Costello. Calling him before a show in San Francisco, MOJO could quiz the man they called 'Basher' on solo chart hits in the late '70s, '80s supergroup Little Village or writing the totemic (What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love And Understanding. Instead, the 74-year-old reformed pub rock party animal and master-*pasticheur* is looking back 25 years to the re-released *Dig My Mood*, perhaps the pick of his wryly sober second-act albums as an affable national treasure of beautifully carpentered old-school singer-songwriting.

***Dig My Mood* is packed with songs that sound tailored to your erstwhile father-in-law, Johnny Cash. Was he in mind?**

Yes, one track was like a Johnny Cash tribute group, Man That I've Become. I had him in mind there. When I heard him sing a few of my songs, I was always taken with his phrasing. He phrased them better than I had – he stripped out my poncey bits. I then tried to do his Everyman way of phrasing. He was fabulous.

You cover Henry McCullough's Failed Christian. Did you know him?

Quite well, actually, first of all in Brinsley Schwarz when our manager Dave Robinson brought him along to a rehearsal. We were totally in awe. He was in Eire Apparent then The Grease Band, the first cool, famous person we'd ever met. Then he was in Wings, and Dave's machinations got us on their [1973] tour.

How was Macca?

Very keen on engendering a we're-all-going-on-a-summer-holiday vibe, so we went on the same bus and stayed in the same hotels. His band treated him in a very cavalier fashion – they certainly weren't rolling over and letting him scratch their tummies. These guys were top players and I think they thought he was washed up and lucky to have them, though there was an element of sympathy that he had to get his wife in the group. I spent a lot of time talking to Linda on that bus. She was really, really nice. Plus, I thought she did a great job in that group ,though there was a lot of sniggering.

Around the age of 40, with your career on the slide, Elvis Costello cajoled you into opening his show with a short solo set. A lightbulb moment?

It was quite an eye-opener. I realised that you can easily put over a good song with just an acoustic guitar in a big theatre or even a stadium. And after a couple of these solo shows, I realised that playing loud wasn't right for me. Much better to play quietly. I've always been interested in music that swings because it's so mysterious how two instruments react against each other and produce a third element. You can't swing loud; it can only be done quietly, and the intensity will come.

Does your wife Peta take a view on your repertoire drawing on the experience of previous relationships?

Yes, she does rather. But she's quite a bit younger and knows that I had a life before she came along. I think of myself as a Tin Pan Alley sort of guy – a catchy tune and an idea that could appeal to anybody. I draw on my own experience but invent characters to sing the song. I'm very keen on the humour in people's disastrous mistakes, mishandled love affairs, stupid lies. Humour highlights the poignancy – somebody explaining they're doing their best, just not getting a break. I'm very fond of that hapless character because I've been one.

Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before.

I seem to have spouted and babbled my way through so many interviews without any filter at all. Um, when I was in Rockpile with Dave Edmunds, Elvis gave us the song Girls Talk. Elvis was pleased with it and I think wanted to impress Edmunds. The lyric was quite dense with one lumpy bit that made sense when Elvis sang it, but for a rock'n'roll band like we were it held up proceedings a bit. So Edmunds said, "Well, I haven't got the faintest idea what he's talking about anyway, so we'll get rid of that line and put in our own which scans better." Yes, Elvis did notice and yes, he was cross! He's told me since that he rather regrets giving it to us!

Mat Snow

The 25th anniversary edition of Dig My Mood is released on July 28 on Yep Roc Records.

LOWE'S HIGHS

The Jesus Of Cool's hit handful.

1 **Cliff Richard And The Drifters** *Apron Strings* (FROM CLIFF, COLUMBIA, 1959)

2 **Chubby Checker** *Limbo Rock* (PARKWAY SINGLE, 1962)

3 **Desmond Dekker & The Aces** *Fu Manchu* (BEVERLEY'S SINGLE, 1968)

4 **Bill Haley And His Comets** *That's How I Got To Memphis* (VOGUE SINGLE, 1969)

5 **Bobby Womack** *Lookin' For A Love* (UA SINGLE, 1974)

> "I'm very keen on the humour in people's disastrous mistakes…"
> NICK LOWE

Speakers corner: (clockwise from main pic) forward the bass, Notting Hill Carnival, 1973; it's a fair cop: a policeman and reveller enjoy the '73 Carnival; Linett Kamala, AKA DJ Thunderbird, on the decks in 1985.

50 YEARS AFTER SOUND SYSTEMS FIRST HIT THE NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL, WHAT'S NEXT?

GOING TO Notting Hill Carnival is a feast for the senses, but transcending even the costumes, the food and the aromas has to be the 30-plus sound systems that soundtrack the August Bank Holiday celebration of Caribbean culture in Britain. This year also marks a half-century since Leslie 'Teacher' Palmer, festival director from 1973 to 1975, first broadened the formerly Trinidad-focused event's remit to include the whole Caribbean, and made sound systems the "Fifth Discipline of Carnival" alongside Masquerade, Steel Pan, Calypso and Soca.

Linett Kamala, a rare female DJ who played with Disya Jeneration sound system from the mid-'80s, first went in 1970 when she was "five, six years old. I remember being carried on the shoulders of my father, looking down towards Ladbroke Grove and a sea of people. I've never forgotten the bass – you feel it internally throughout your whole body before you hear it… it's like you're listening to the bass line of your mother's heart before you're even born."

Ishmahil Blagrove Jr and Margaret Busby's remarkable 2014 book Carnival: A Photographic And Testimonial History Of The Notting Hill Carnival provides much fascinating detail on the first year of the sound systems. 1973 handbills refer to it as both the West Indian Peoples' Carnival and the Notting Hill Carnival, and reveal that the first sound systems to play were Bertram The Wasp, Zion, Paddington Terror, Papa Weasel, Black Basil, and Six-By-Six and Lord Sam: accounts reveal they were paid £10 each, while steel bands like The Brothers and the Arawaks got £30.

"It was quite different then," says Kamala. "People would literally just string up [their speakers] on the street. Mr Palmer is crucially important because he realised there was a whole group of young people being really influenced by reggae music, and they were not really represented. They weren't playing steel pans, you know? And he said we must have them at the Carnival. From those sound systems, from roots, dancehall, jungle, drum'n'bass and house, it's gone global. The DJ, the call-and-response to the crowd, stopping the record and bringing it back up – that's all 100 per cent Jamaican, which is why UNESCO added reggae music to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity."

> **"That's all 100 per cent Jamaican. That's gone global."**
> **LINETT KAMALA**

As a teen in the '80s, she goes on, she gravitated to Mastermind sound, who played electro and rap for the younger revellers, and also mixed the celebrated *Street Sounds UK Electro* comp in 1984. "Some people just want to talk about the roots reggae side of sound systems," she says. "I mean, I love Channel One and Killer Watt but there are other sound systems. Arts-A-Light are unique, the only gospel sound system, doing their thing for the longest time – I know people's mums that go to that. There's Disco Hustlers, who bring a more house music flavour, Mastermind are still steadfast, Platinum Soul Sound System… they might not have a high profile, but they're solid in the community."

She adds that she's now left Disya Jeneration and is training a new generation with her Lin Kam Art Sound System Futures Programme. "We're going to be partnering up with Disco Hustlers," she says. "You're going to see more females, for example, and visibility for a broader range of groups. But you kind of keep your little bits close to your chest – we want things to be a bit of a nice surprise."

Ian Harrison

The Notting Hill Carnival 2023 runs from August 27 to 28.

GIMME FIVE… SONGS COMPLAINING ABOUT TAX

The Beatles
Taxman
(PARLOPHONE, 1966)

The Platonic ideal of the successful musician's gripe with the tax authorities, though to be fair George did take issue with paying out a whopping 90 per cent of their earnings. He later played it live and name-checked PM John Major.

Fred Wesley And The J.B.'s
I'm Payin' Taxes, What Am I Buyin'?
(PEOPLE, 1974)

A wild burst of scat-singing, funk and super trombone. Courtesy of singer James Brown, the answer is: "A whole lot of cussin' and fussin' and everybody cryin'." Sounds like self-assessment time.

Johnny Paycheck
Me And The I.R.S.
(EPIC, 1978)

The country wildman vows never to pay his taxes again, saying, "to hell with" the US Internal Revenue Service. He wasn't bluffing: in 1990 the US government demanded $1.6 million in back taxes (Johnny was in jail for a bar-room shooting at the time).

The Exploited
Don't Pay The Poll Tax
(ROUGH JUSTICE, 1990)

Wattie and his marauders bring thrashed-up street punk with an admirably direct instruction for Prime Minister Thatcher to insert the relevant forms for the controversial tax in an unmentionable place. Protest song at its most brave and astringent.

Champion Jack Dupree
Income Tax
(BLUE HORIZON, 1968)

The blues pianist, ex-boxer and former resident of Halifax reflects on doing a stint in jail for not getting his forms in on time, or at all, because of cash flow problems, which seems unfair. He didn't pay his alimony either.

Linett Kamala, Adrian Boot/urbanimage.tv, Chris Steele-Perkins/Magnum

Risqué business: Bobby Rush, keeping things raw in 1978; (below) still keeping things raw today.

BOBBY RUSH, STILL RUDELY FUNKING UP THE BLUES

AT 89, BOBBY RUSH prevails as one of the oldest surviving bluesmen, yet it has taken him well into his eighth decade in action to gain substantive plaudits.

Twenty years ago, Rolling Stone crowned him "the King of the Chitlin Circuit", a back-handed compliment which implied his style was too bawdy to cross over to mass – ie, white – audiences. But if titles including Bow-Legged Woman, Knock-Kneed Man and She Caught Me With My Pants Down may fluster the puritanical, next month his late career roll continues with the self-released *All My Love For You*.

"When you've done music as long as I have, you know that there's nothing new under the sun," he says of his ribald take on blues, via Zoom between shows supporting Buddy Guy. "I just try to be as raw as I possibly can".

Rush was born Emmett Ellis Jr in rural Homer, Louisiana on November 10, 1933. After his family moved to Arkansas in '47, he befriended juke-joint regulars Elmore James and Ike Turner, and learnt to play using a sugarcane syrup bucket and a broom-wire diddley bow. His first backing combo, the Four Jivers, included James's cousin Boyd Gilmore and ivory-tickler Pinetop Perkins, later celebrated as a member of Muddy Waters' ensemble. When his family relocated again to Chicago, he became Waters' neighbour.

"Chicago was like upstate Mississippi, there was so many blues musicians there," he laughs, but though Rush worked the clubs alongside Howlin' Wolf, Jimmy Reed and Sonny Boy Williamson, he struggled to record more than the occasional 45. In '71, he finally made headway with greasy groove Chicken Heads, styling himself as "the man who put the funk into the blues."

"I've been this funky all along," he notes, "but James Brown and I were good friends, Little Richard too, and I knew some of their licks… Chicken Heads really came from Louis Jordan talking about the monkey and the buzzard. I just liked talking about things that I related to as a country boy, which was hog, cow, chicken – the cotton, the corn, the farmers and the social things around me."

Hard to categorise, Rush continued to fall through the cracks between genres, briefly signing with disco juggernaut Philadelphia International. In the mid-2010s, he says, he scored his first effective manager "who treated me like a gentleman", and business surged at last, with awards, documentary appearances and even a musical in production.

"I often talk about modification," he reasons, with characteristic pungency. "Like, when I was a kid, we didn't have electric lights in the house, had an outside toilet. They look bad, they smell bad. Now I have nine bathrooms in my house. But what you do in them never changes. That's modification."

Andrew Perry

All My Love For You is out via Deep Rush/Thirty Tigers on August 18.

RUSH RELEASES

Three of Bobby's finest.

Rush Hour
(PHILADELPHIA INTERNATIONAL, 1979)

His long-playing debut, some 30 years into his career. I Wanna Do The Do finds the inveterate funkateer greasing up the four-on-the-floor idiom like a Southern George Clinton, while ludicrous humour prevails on I Can't Find My Keys.

Chicken Heads: A 50-Year History Of Bobby Rush
(OMNIVORE, 2015)

Rush's scattered early one-offs for labels including Jerry-O, ABC, Checker and VeeJay subsidiary Galaxy, anthologised over four discs. Ribald later-career highlights include Buttermilk Bottom, Hen Pecked and the ultra-rude Night Fishin'.

Porcupine Meat
(ROUNDER, 2016)

The octogenarian Rush was cutting his most crisp and accomplished records to date, which on this outing bagged the Best Traditional Blues Album Grammy. His mirthfully worded battle-of-the-sexes psychodramas reach their apotheosis on I Think Your Dress Is Too Short.

Getty, Arnie Goodman

"I just try to be as raw as I possibly can."
BOBBY RUSH

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> "If you love music and you love travelling you've got a toxic combination."
> **MARGO CILKER**

Margo Cilker reaches her peak on new LP *Valley Of Heart's Delight.*

Jen Borst

HIT THE TRAILS WITH AMERICANA ADVENTURER MARGO CILKER

IN A GENRE obsessed with leavin', cheatin', done-me-wrongs, it's refreshing to find an Americana singer-songwriter looking for the kindness and good in people. But accentuating the positive is only one of the reasons 30-year-old California native Margo Cilker stands out from the pack.

For a start, although she's been travelling and touring her entire adult life, she's resisted the siren call of Nashville, living instead on a ranch on the banks of the Columbia River in Washington state with her songwriting cowboy husband, Forrest VanTuyl.

"Nashville, Austin, just cities in general, don't really call to me," Cilker says. "I've worked a bunch of jobs in the past to fund my music, and your labour just goes a lot further in a small town where you're not paying city rents."

Cilker has an innate thirst for travel, living in Bilbao, Spain, studying in South Carolina on the other side of the US from her Los Altos birthplace, constantly touring and moving, gathering stories and people with which to pepper her songs. It was while living in the Basque country during her early twenties that songwriting became the central element of her life, and the troubadour existence truly took hold.

"If you love music and you love travelling you've got a toxic combination, and at some point you're gonna get in a van," she says with mock despair. "You need resilience to live that way, and there's no 'off' switch, but the rewards for it are immense. I don't know where that resilience comes from, though. Stupidity? Family curse?"

Unlike most rambling singer-songwriters, there's a sense with Cilker that the restlessness in her music comes not from extracting herself from situations, but rather running headlong into new adventures. "Oh it's far too rosy to say I've never burned bridges. I've had to make fresh starts, but I've wanted to do this since I was a kid and now that I can, I'm all in."

Not that Cilker can't turn her hand to life's darker side. With The Middle, a pivotal track on her second album *Valley Of Heart's Delight*, takes a hard look at a woman battling alcoholic temptation in the hours between morning coffee and an "acceptable" wine o'clock. "Does she die at the end? Oh my god, that's so dark! I mean, the lyrics do have double meanings, can be interpreted in different ways, but I don't think she does. I hope not."

Mostly, however, Cilker writes about family and friends, unpicking relationships and shining light on the truth and beauty of friendship, kinship and just being. For the past two years that's partly meant imposed curbs on her wanderlust and living in the moment on the ranch. So does her life resemble the Dutton family in smash hit Paramount TV show Yellowstone? "Are you kidding me? We watched an episode or two of that show and it was, well, amusing. Life just isn't like that on a ranch, there aren't nearly so many guns."

When you have Margo Cilker's life right now, why would you want to make believe anyway?

Andy Fyfe

Margo Cilker's Valley Of Heart's Delight is released by Loose/Fluff & Gravy on September 15.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Gillian Welch, Townes Van Zandt, Lucinda Williams
- Like Cilker's 2021 debut album *Pohorylle*, *Valley Of Heart's Delight* is produced by one-time Band Of Horses drummer and solo singer-songwriter Sera Cahoone.
- Living on the land and ecological issues are important to Cilker. The album's one cover, Steelhead Trout, by her friend Ben Walden, deals specifically with the dichotomy of rivers dammed for hydroelectric power generation versus the needs of fish desperately trying to reach upstream spawning grounds.
- Although she moved away from Santa Clara Valley where the previous four generations of Cilkers had lived, "I could write about family all day for the rest of my life and still have more things to say."

KEY TRACKS

- Keep It On A Burner
- Mother Told Her Mother Told Me
- With The Middle

MEET BILL ORCUTT, GUITAR RADICAL WITH A WEIRD MOMENTUM 40 YEARS INTO HIS CAREER

"IT'S A MIRACLE to me," says Bill Orcutt, on a warm San Francisco morning in June. "I had this idea for a record. I didn't think anyone would like it. I didn't even press up enough records."

The richly-bearded guitarist and improvisor is talking about *Music For Four Guitars*, a multi-tracked "quartet" for four-string electric guitar, 14 short pieces of minimalist counterpoint that suggests a heavy-treble Captain Beefheart trying their hand at some Festive Frippertronics. "It was unlike anything I'd done before," continues Orcutt, "and it turns out to be my most popular work ever." The success of *Four Guitars*, released in September 2022, was followed by an NPR Tiny Desk concert this April, which saw Orcutt joined by fellow guitar improvisors Wendy Eisenberg, Ava Mendoza and Shane Parish for a live rendition of the LP that invested it with joyous collaborative wildness. Live dates have now been booked for November. "It's a reminder to always follow your bad ideas," says Orcutt, laughing, "The whole thing has a kind of weird momentum."

Weird momentum might be the best way to describe Orcutt's career. In bands from the early '80s, the Miami-born 61-year-old's first recorded output was with post-hardcore trio Harry Pussy, playing weird hiccuping, self-reflexive squalls opposite the whirlpool drumming of frontwoman (and Orcutt's then-wife) Adris Hoyos. "I had to find a new way of playing in order to play with Adris," explains Orcutt. "A way that wasn't going to erase what was unique about her."

In order to define his playing and restrict temptations into formulaic laziness, Orcutt made rules for his playing, an almost Oulipo approach where chord progressions, for example, would be prohibited. "Probably the first rule would have been playing with just four strings," says Orcutt. "That's a very wilful decision but I like parameters. They preclude me from having to make a lot of decisions that wind up feeling arbitrary."

After Harry Pussy imploded in 1998, Orcutt spent the next 10 years working as a software engineer and raising a family before returning to music in 2008. "What changed was I felt confident enough to contemplate the idea of playing solo." Orcutt began exploring the possibilities of the live acoustic guitar, its drones and overtones, cross-referencing his interest in the blues with more debased pieces of American music, such as White Christmas or Zip A Dee Doo Dah, which he covered – or rather, reassembled – on his gloriously fractured 2013 LP, *A History Of Every One*. "They're more authentic to my experience of growing up in the suburbs than, say, Lightnin' Hopkins," he says. "I wanted to turn the acoustic guitar repertoire on its head."

> **"I wanted to turn the acoustic guitar repertoire on its head."**
> **BILL ORCUTT**

Gradually, since 2013, Orcutt has appeared to relax his strict musical parameters, bringing in elements of melody, song structure and multi-tracking. His most recent release is his most surprising, April's *Jump On It*: "I wanted a record that reflects a different side of me," he explains. "I love ECM. I love Keith Jarrett, Ralph Towner, John Abercrombie."

However, while *Jump On It* is arguably the most accessible LP Orcutt has recorded, it comes with his most inaccessible cover. "I'd already rejected that cover because it was so weird," he explains. "But then I thought, Well, I shouldn't pander to people. I should challenge them with something where the cover is in stark contrast to the way it sounds." That's right. After after a lifetime of pandering to people, it's time Bill Orcutt finally put his foot down.

Andrew Male

Music For Four Guitars and Jump On It are both out now on Palilalia Records.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Derek Bailey, Jeff Parker, Lightnin' Hopkins
- "A song has a kind of rhythmic spine to it," believes Orcutt. "You can crack that spine in various places and use those cracks as kind of like inflection points where you can skip back and forward. I always try to find the spots where you can break a song."
- Orcutt has a parallel improv career playing electric guitar with drummer Chris Corsano: "It really doesn't require any thought. It's a situation where I can just do what I like."

KEY TRACKS

- A Different View
- The Life Of Jesus
- What Do You Do With Memory?

Jim Hensley, Alamy

Bill Orcutt: breaking the back of songs.

MOJO PLAYLIST

Turn on! For the month's perfect rock, Dead covers and insect odes.

1 APHEX TWIN BLACKBOX LIFE RECORDER 21F
Beats with a stutter, aqueous chords and a bodiless voice await rave tape breaks: familiar Aphex obsessions, but they still make the synapses shimmy. From a new EP out this month.
Find it: *streaming services*

2 STEELY DAN THE SECOND ARRANGEMENT
A thought-lost song for 1980's sign-off *Gaucho*, this is pure, peak, immaculate Dan with the compromised words of a world betrayed.
Find it: *YouTube*

3 THE 3 CLUBMEN GREEN GREEN GRASSHOPPER
XTC's Andy Partridge, FSOL's Stu Rowe and US singer Jen Olive team up for an EP. This bucolic paean to the titular insect is most Partridge-y.
Find it: *streaming services; CD from burningshed.com*

4 BOB DYLAN STELLA BLUE
Live in Barcelona, Dylan furnishes another Grateful Dead cover with his first-ever performance of the Dead's 1973 song. Sweetly heartrending and resident in the twilight.
Find it: *YouTube*

5 CINDY WILSON MIDNIGHT
The B-52's may be on their way out, but singer Cindy is pushing on with faraway, Moroder-esque electro futurism. The virtual B-side from debut single Wait.
Find it: *streaming services*

6 THE BREEDERS GO MAN GO
A Kim Deal-Black Francis co-write, intended for *The Last Splash*? As queasiness and indie rock grandeur share a cab, it sounds like both of her bands, in the best way.
Find it: *YouTube*

7 YARD ACT THE TRENCH COAT MUSEUM
Elton's pals come back with rubbery, LCD-in-Yorks dance-rock sounds with long mac as cypher: the cockeyed eight-minute video may have further chapters.
Find it: *streaming services*

8 ANOUSHKA SHANKAR STOLEN MOMENTS
The sitarist reunites with Arooj Aftab for a coolly sinuous instrumental full of contemplative space and light.
Find it: *YouTube*

9 THE ANCHORESS LOVE WILL TEAR US APART
With a covers LP pending, a piano reworking of Ian Curtis's epitaph. The decaying love at its heart never sounded more devastating.
Find it: *streaming services*

10 ANIMAL COLLECTIVE DEFEAT
A 22-minute hymnal of fortitude and grace, like being inside a glass harmonica, then a mellow beehive: a 12-inch next month.
Find it: *streaming services*

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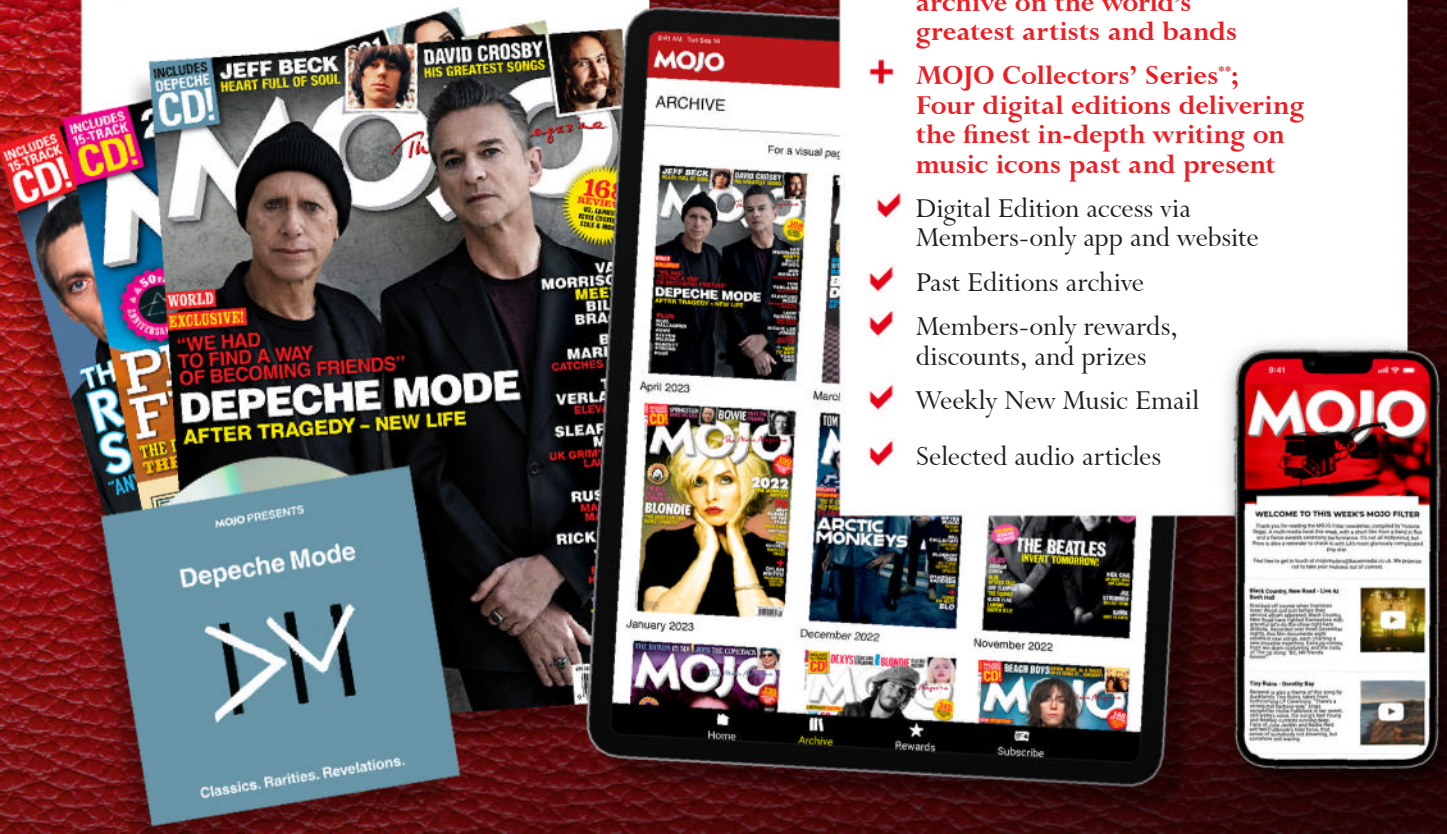

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Watching **Jimi Hendrix** turned a **teenage accordion prodigy** into a **rock'n'roll lifer,** solo star and Swiss Army sideman to **Bruce and Neil (and Lou).** "I've kept waiting for the possession to leave me," says **Nils Lofgren**, **"and it still hasn't."**

Interview by **BOB MEHR** • Portrait by **ROB DeMARTIN**

"I'M FEELING PLEASANTLY BEAT UP," SAYS Nils Lofgren, groggy but grinning from beneath a knit cap.

It's an early June morning and the diminutive Lofgren is spread out on a couch in his Scottsdale, Arizona home, where he's back for a rare week off in between legs of the current Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band world tour – roadwork that began in January and will carry through to the end of 2023. "I'm a little jet-lagged and punch drunk from all the experience and travel," says Lofgren, as he makes tea for his wife Amy and cuddles his dogs. "But it's better than being stuck the way we were a few years ago."

Born in Chicago and raised just outside Washington DC, the 72-year-old Lofgren has been on the road and in the music business since he was a teenager. A childhood accordion prodigy turned on to rock'n'roll by The Beatles, he found career direction after seeing Jimi Hendrix, and has become an indispensable multi-instrumentalist and creative foil for two of America's most iconic and enduring musical figures in Springsteen and Neil Young.

His work with Young stretches across some six decades – dating back to *After The Gold Rush* and his early membership in Crazy Horse. Having joined the E Street Band during the *Born In The USA* tour, next year will mark Lofgren's 40th anniversary as part of Springsteen's crew. All that has run parallel with his own career as a name artist, which began with his '70s combo Grin, and then later as a solo act over the course of 21 soulful albums, including the current *Mountains*.

Written during a reflective moment amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the new album recounts Lofgren's loves and losses. I Remember Her Name chronicles the meetings, 15 years apart, that led to his marriage to Amy. Nothing's Easy – which features Young on vocals – quotes a line from *Tonight's The Night*'s Tired Eyes, as the spectre of late Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten haunts the chilling reckonings of Only Ticket Out and Dream Killer. There are fond farewells to Charlie Watts, on Won't Cry No More, and to David Crosby, who adds his final harmonies to the record.

Mountains emerges from what's been a decidedly busy period for Lofgren. Since 2019, he's made four new records with Crazy Horse, including this year's *All Roads Lead Home*, released under the Molina, Talbot, Lofgren & Young moniker.

As he settles in for several hours of chat, Lofgren is happy to look back on what's been a long and musically charmed journey. "It's been a lot of years," he says. "It's worth taking stock of everything that's happened."

What was the first music you recall hearing?

My mom and dad were big dancers, so there was a lot of big band, swing band, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett around. They were tuned into the healing and inspiring properties of music – they loved it, but they didn't force it on us. For some reason a lot of the kids on our block, couple of the older kids, played accordion. When I was five, I asked my parents if I could take accordion lessons and I ➢

WE'RE NOT WORTHY

Nils's boss, **The Boss**, on a unique talent.

"Nils is a unique combination of talents: musical and psychological and emotional. Steve [Van Zandt] and I are both *rock* guitarists – we squeeze the neck until it squeals – but there's a *musicalness* to Nils's playing that's uniquely his. He's also about the nicest guy you've ever met. They don't come sweeter."

Rob DeMartin

just fell in love with the study of music. After waltzes and polkas, my teachers moved me into classical, and I won some contests. My parents – bless 'em – they paid for, like, 10 years of lessons.

As a trained musician, did you relate to rock'n'roll early on?

When I'm 10 or 11, and somebody plays a Jerry Lee Lewis record, I'm too young emotionally to understand it beyond the fact that it's three chords: C, F, G. I didn't get it. But a few years later, when I'm 13, The Beatles come out and with the extra chords, the melodies, the raw visceral soul they had, it exploded on me. It was through The Beatles and Stones, the British Invasion and their American counterparts, The Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, that I went and discovered Stax-Volt, Little Richard and Muddy Waters and my whole life changed. I was playing Beatles medleys at my 9th grade talent show on accordion. But then I put down the accordion and just got infatuated with the guitar. I started playing in little bands in teen clubs. But back then nobody in Bethesda, Maryland thought you could make a living playing in a band, including me. I just played for fun. My whole thing was to get Bs in school for my dad and mom so I could play sports all the time: football, basketball, soccer.

What finally made you think music was your future?

Wasn't until [1967] when I went and saw Herman's Hermits and The Who with Blues Magoos at Constitution Hall in Washington DC, and then we ran over afterwards to hear Jimi Hendrix at the Ambassador Theater on his first tour. The Who were great, Herman's Hermits were great, the Blues Magoos had on the blinking light suits. But seeing Jimi that night… Hendrix was so insanely good on every level – visual, emotional, musical – that I left there possessed, uncomfortably so, actually. Like, Man, I think I need to be a professional rock musician. And the thought had never crossed my mind until that night. After that, I put a note to my mom and dad under my pillow, dropped out of school and ran away to Greenwich Village to look for work. That's 55 years ago. I've kept waiting for the possession to leave me and it still hasn't.

In your teens, you made a lot of connections just going around to concerts, sneaking backstage and meeting musicians…

On the Jeff Beck Band's first tour, they were in Alexandria, Virginia playing a roller rink. I snuck backstage trying to find the band. Peter Grant, this giant 300-pound manager with a Fu Manchu, sees me: "Where's your ticket? Where's your pass?" He starts dragging me by the scruff of the neck to the door. Ronnie Wood and Rod Stewart poke their heads out of the dressing room and say, "Leave him be, leave him be, he's with us." They saved my ass from Peter Grant, and so I befriended them. I got to meet Jeff Beck and I started following them around the East Coast. I'd go to Rod and Ronnie's hotel room with my Tele – I was blown away they would allow me, this kid, into their circle. Then the phone would ring, and it was like, "Hey Nils, the girls are coming up – time to go" (*laughs*).

But I got to meet a lot of my heroes that way. I snuck into this dressing room at the Cellar Door – this tiny place where I later met Neil Young – to see Muddy Waters. He was in there playing cards with six or seven guys, yelling, "Hit me! Hit Me!" They didn't notice until finally Muddy Waters looks and sees this white kid standing there. "Oh Mr Waters, I bought tickets to both your shows, I'm so excited to see you. Do you mind if I just stay here and watch you play cards?" He just looked at me funny and said, "Sure, kid." I didn't know anything about show business, so I'd try and ask for advice or just learn whatever I could just being around people like that.

Another person you saw up close was the great guitarist Roy Buchanan – what did you take from him?

I became aware of Roy early on and I'd go see him play at this redneck bar called the Crossroads. I had a little Beatle haircut over my ears, and Roy would have to tell the clientele, who didn't like how I looked, to leave me alone. I loved Roy, I couldn't believe how great he was. There was Hendrix, Jeff Beck and Roy Buchanan that impacted me the most. We jammed a lot, even with Grin – we thought Roy could be the fourth member of the band. But he had four kids and a family. Roy was like, "Nils, I'm gonna go to barber school 'cos I need a more solid job." He graduated and started cutting hair at Montgomery Mall in Bethesda. He was a great guy, but a tortured soul, of course. It was devastating when we lost Roy [Buchanan was found hanged in a Virginia jail cell in 1988]. The police did him in. I don't believe he killed himself.

In 1969, you were up and running with Grin and about to make a move to California, when you met Neil Young and Crazy Horse…

Grin had auditioned for [Hendrix engineer] Eddie Kramer in New York and we'd struck out. We weren't good enough for Eddie. Even though I was immature, I wasn't stupid enough to think there was something wrong with Eddie; I knew there was something wrong with us. So, I figured we'll just keep writing songs and we'll go out to LA and try there. That's when I encountered Neil at the Cellar Door. He had his Martin guitar and said, "Sing me a song." I had just about the whole first Grin record written. I think I played him four or five things: Like Rain, Outlaw, If I Were A Song. Neil said, "That's really good, why don't you hang out with us?" I was underage, so [Young's manager] Elliot Roberts gets me a cheeseburger and Coke and a table for the show. I had loved Neil from the Buffalo Springfield, but I was blown away by Crazy Horse on that first tour. Neil said to look him up when I got to LA. True to his word, when I did, he hooked me up with [his producer] David Briggs. Neil and David – those two guys became my greatest mentors.

A LIFE IN PICTURES

Grin and wear it: Nils through the ages.

1 Brothers in arms: the young Nils (left) with even younger sibling Mike.

2 Keep smiling: Grin, 1973 (from left) Tom Lofgren, Nils Lofgren, Bob Berberich, Bob Gordon.

3 The reluctant soloist: Lofgren during the cover shoot for 1976's *Cry Tough*.

4 Computer agents: Lofgren (left) with Neil Young, translating *Trans* on-stage in Paris, September 16, 1982.

5 Glory days: Lofgren with Bruce Springsteen, 1985.

6 Smells like E Street spirit: Lofgren pals up with Nirvana's Krist Novoselic at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony in New York, April 10, 2014.

7 "One of the great tours of my life": Lofgren takes time out in 1989 with fellow All-Starr Band members Ringo Starr and Dr. John.

8 Squeeze-boxing clever: Lofgren revisits his accordion virtuoso youth at the 30th Annual Bridge School Benefit Concert, Mountain View, CA, October 23, 2016.

9 Glass half-full: Lofgren during the cover shoot for his self-titled 1975 debut solo album – "I've been blessed with a gift I didn't ask for."

Courtesy Nils Lofgren, Joel Bernstein, Ed Caraeff /Iconic Images (2), Getty (4), Alamy

You ended up playing on *After The Gold Rush* and also became part of Crazy Horse on their first band album. I imagine those were formative experiences on a lot of levels for a teenager.

I used to get into David Briggs's VW and we'd drive up the hill to Neil's blasting Creedence Clearwater Revival every day going to work on *After The Gold Rush*. I remember telling David, "Wow, it's cool not to be a band leader – all the stuff that's non-musical goes away." Even then I realised it's great to be in a great band and not have to lead it. With Crazy Horse, I didn't know they were going to ask me to join. But I'd gotten to be friends with Danny [Whitten], Ralphie [Molina] and Billy [Talbot] and then you got Jack Nitzsche who's a genius and a mad man playing keyboards and producing. This was heady stuff for me. I was so lucky to hook up with these great savvy, compassionate players at such a young age. That imprinted on me my whole life up to the present day.

Danny Whitten's life and death have been so mythologised, partly because of the *Tonight's The Night* album, but his passing must've had a real impact on you.

It did. Danny flew to Maryland at one point, potentially to join Grin. He had just deteriorated. His life had become drugs and alcohol. I remember we were going to see Roy Buchanan play. And just as the show is about to start, a guy comes on the mike: "Paging Nils Lofgren to the stage – you have a phone call." It's our roadie saying, "I've lost Danny." "What do you mean?" "He snuck out – he's probably going door to door in the dark in rural Maryland looking for drugs." Fuck!

We realised Danny was too sick to be in our band. When he left, it was heartbreaking. And, of course, it's well documented the saga with Neil trying to help Danny out, and then Danny ODs. That was a big turning point – when everyone started dying, your heroes and your friends. Jimi Hendrix had died. And when Danny died, it was like, Oh my God. By the time we get to *Tonight's The Night* it's a different world.

The *Tonight's The Night* album and tour seemed like a strange wake or maybe an exorcism of some kind.

Nobody was in a good place. I certainly didn't have any tools to process what had happened. Then we went on the road and people were expecting to hear Heart Of Gold and receive Neil as their hero-poet. But we're doing a show where it's all this dark stuff they've never heard and Neil's doing these intense raps and we're making all this noise. People were booing, throwing bottles, it was heavy. There was a madness to it. But the music and the madness kind of saved us, got us through the grief and the rage.

"Peter Grant sees me: 'Where's your pass?' Starts dragging me by the scruff of the neck to the door."

With Grin, you released several great records in a short period, then you split abruptly in the mid-'70s – why?

We made four good albums with Briggs, got good reviews, and we became a great road act – we were the band that would open for anyone and everyone. But we were not making money for the record company and they were not interested in continuing. Briggs and [manager and future film producer] Art Linson checked out all the other companies, and no one was interested in signing us. We did a farewell concert at the Kennedy Center in DC and tried to go out with some class and dignity, but it was a very traumatic period. A&M records finally said, "We'll give Nils a solo deal, one record at a time to see how it goes." So I kinda had to wrap my head around carrying on as a solo artist – even though I didn't even like that term.

Your self-titled debut came out in 1975 and featured Keith Don't Go, your tribute to Keith Richards. What inspired the song?

On the *Tonight's The Night* Tour in 1973 in England, every day I met what seemed like half a dozen of Keith Richards' "best friends". All of them were saying, "We're really worried about Keith, we don't know if he's going to be around much longer." I'm thinking, Keith Richards just made *Exile On Main St.* – he can't be in that bad a shape. That was my naïve take on it (*laughs*). But constantly hearing all these friends worried about him, I got this idea, and had this riff. For the box set [2014's *Face The Music*] we found an earlier version, of Grin recording it, with Neil actually playing some piano and singing. That's my favourite version, very raw and aggressive, with Neil's haunting voice going, "Keith don't go…"

It was around this time that you tried for the Stones guitar gig, right?

I was running errands in Maryland and I hear on the radio Mick Taylor has left the Stones. I gotta ask for an audition. Before I can do anything, I think, Ronnie Wood – he's the guy, that's his gig. But a month passes, and they still haven't announced a new guitar player. What's ➢

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going on? I tried calling the Stones, couldn't get through to anybody. Finally, I got hold of Ronnie Wood. He says, "I turned the Stones down, I'm gonna stay with Rod and the Faces. But I told Keith about you. He's staying at my cottage – call him up." I call and sure enough Keith answers. "Yeah, Ronnie told me about you… we're gonna get the band together in Geneva and we're gonna have a bunch of guitar players come through. You're welcome to come out." Of course, not too long after, Ronnie realised he should take the gig and he did.

How did your unlikely collaboration with Lou Reed start?

I was working with [producer] Bob Ezrin on an album, and Bob said, "You got some great music, but the lyrics aren't up to standard. Rather than have you rewrite, how about we bring in a lyricist?" I said, "Well, it depends on who it is." He goes, "How about Lou Reed?" Next thing I know I'm in a cab across town to Lou's apartment, and we're sitting there drinking and watching a football game together. Anyway, I put together a tape with 13 songs, music with some lyrics, a couple of titles, and FedEx it to Lou. Three weeks go by. It's 4.30 in the morning, telephone rings. "Nils, this is Lou Reed. Sorry for the late call but I haven't slept for three days and nights. I loved your cassette and I just finished 13 sets of lyrics. Do you want me to dictate them to you now?" I said, "Did you call and tell me I just wrote 13 songs with Lou Reed?" We had a good chuckle about this pretty painless co-writing adventure. I ended up using three of the songs on my *Nils* album and Lou used three on *The Bells*. I put a couple more on [1995's] *Damaged Goods*. Over the years, Lou and I would talk occasionally about doing something with the other songs. Sadly, we lost Lou but I ended up getting the rest of them out on the *Blue With Lou* [2019] album.

In the early '80s you reconnected with Neil Young during his *Trans* period. What did you make of his music at that time?

That was very powerful. On *Trans*, he gave those machines a soul, a voice, a name. He wrote songs about these machines' experiences to help handicapped children. To me, that's genius. For the tour, we rehearsed for, like, two and a half months at his farm. On one hand it was old school: I'd be playing the *After The Gold Rush* upright piano on Old Man, and Ben Keith is there with his pedal steel. But then I'd put on a headset, and I've got a voice called Sylvia coming out of my head and we're doing Computer Age, with Synclavier and all these crazy sounds. Neil was overseeing this forward-thinking space-age tour but mixing in the old classic funky rock stuff, all flowing in and out of each other. It was strange and beautiful.

In terms of your solo career, when the early-'80s rolled around, did you find yourself at another crossroads?

Basically, everything dried up. I had an album, one of my best I think, called *Wonderland*, on Danny Bramson's [MCA imprint] Backstreets Records. Then Irving Azoff took over MCA and got rid of Danny. I'd known Irving from way back when he was palling around with Elliot Roberts. I met with him and I said, "Listen, I understand I might be one of the acts you have to clean house with because I don't make you money." It was the standard showbiz thing. Irving says, "Don't worry. It's going to be great" – and they'd already signed my release papers (*laughs*). Then followed a period where I could not get a record deal. "Nils, you're a dinosaur" – I heard the word "dinosaur" more than a few times in '82 and '83. To basically have the industry say *en masse*, you've had a good run but there's no place for you here any more… that's tough, that's pretty scary. And I hit a blue period.

Which is where you connected, or rather reconnected, with Bruce Springsteen…

I'd met him back in 1970. Steel Mill, Bruce's band, and Grin did an audition night for Bill Graham, so I'd known him since then. When I called Bruce [in 1983] I was kinda saying, I don't know what to do here with my career. We just went around and jammed in clubs and hung out. He offered me some support during a rough time. Then at some point a month before opening night of the *Born In The USA* tour Bruce needed a guitar player. Stevie [Van Zandt] felt he needed to devote 100 per cent of his time to his solo career. And I got the job. Out of the blue, I wind up in another great band.

You were also in Ringo Starr's first All-Starr Band…

I'd met Ringo on the *Born In The USA* tour, after one of our shows at Wembley. I got to jam with him and he gave me his number and said to stay in touch. Fast forward to '89, I'm living in LA, and he's telling me the fame and money weren't cutting it, that he needs to be a drummer – and so he came up with the All-Starr Band concept, where everyone does a few numbers, and he gets to go out front and sing and dance to Photograph and You're Sixteen, but mostly he sits at the drums and is a drummer. The E Street Band had been put on hiatus, and so the fact that he wanted me in his band was a huge blessing. Ringo asked, "Don't you wanna know who else is in the band?" I said, "If you're in the band that's enough for me." He laughed and then said, "It's you and Joe Walsh on guitars, Billy Preston on organ, Dr. John on piano, Levon Helm on drums, mandolin, and whatever else he wants to play, Rick Danko on bass, your buddy Clarence Clemons on sax, and Jim Keltner's gonna be our third drummer. I was like, "You gotta be kidding me." It was one of the great tours of my life.

It must've been interesting to see Ringo experience touring for the first time in the modern age.

His only frame of reference to the road was The Beatles. I remember we were in rehearsals, and they had two giant PA speakers under his riser coming through grates, aimed at him, just beautiful monitors. And he's up there going, "I can't believe how great everything sounds." During a break, the soundman comes up and

Rob DeMartin

PLAY TO GRIN

Three shots of Nils Lofgren, by **Bob Mehr**.

THE POWERPOP PRELUDE

Grin

★★★★

1 + 1

(SPINDIZZY, 1972)

The sophomore effort from Lofgren's Grin – which also features drummer/vocalist Bob Berberich and bassist Bob Gordon – is arguably the best of the band's four-album run. Divided into two halves – the Rockin' Side and Dreamy Side – Lofgren hooks the listener with the keen riffage of White Lies and Moon Tears, while he offers up more ethereal pleasures via his acoustic playing and angelic voice on the Beatles-esque Sometimes and Lost A Number.

THE SPOTLIGHT KID

Nils Lofgren

★★★★

Nils Lofgren

(A&M, 1975)

Solo debut that bridges West Coast pop and country rock, connected by Lofgren's rhythmic smarts and moody lyrical meditations. Standouts include the lovelorn Back It Up and the autobiographical The Sun Hasn't Set On This Boy Yet, while Keith Don't Go (Ode To The Glimmer Twin) is the rare tribute song that works ("Don't nail yourself to a cross," his hero is implored). The sort of soulful songwriting Lofgren would make a career of.

RETURN OF THE SIDEMAN

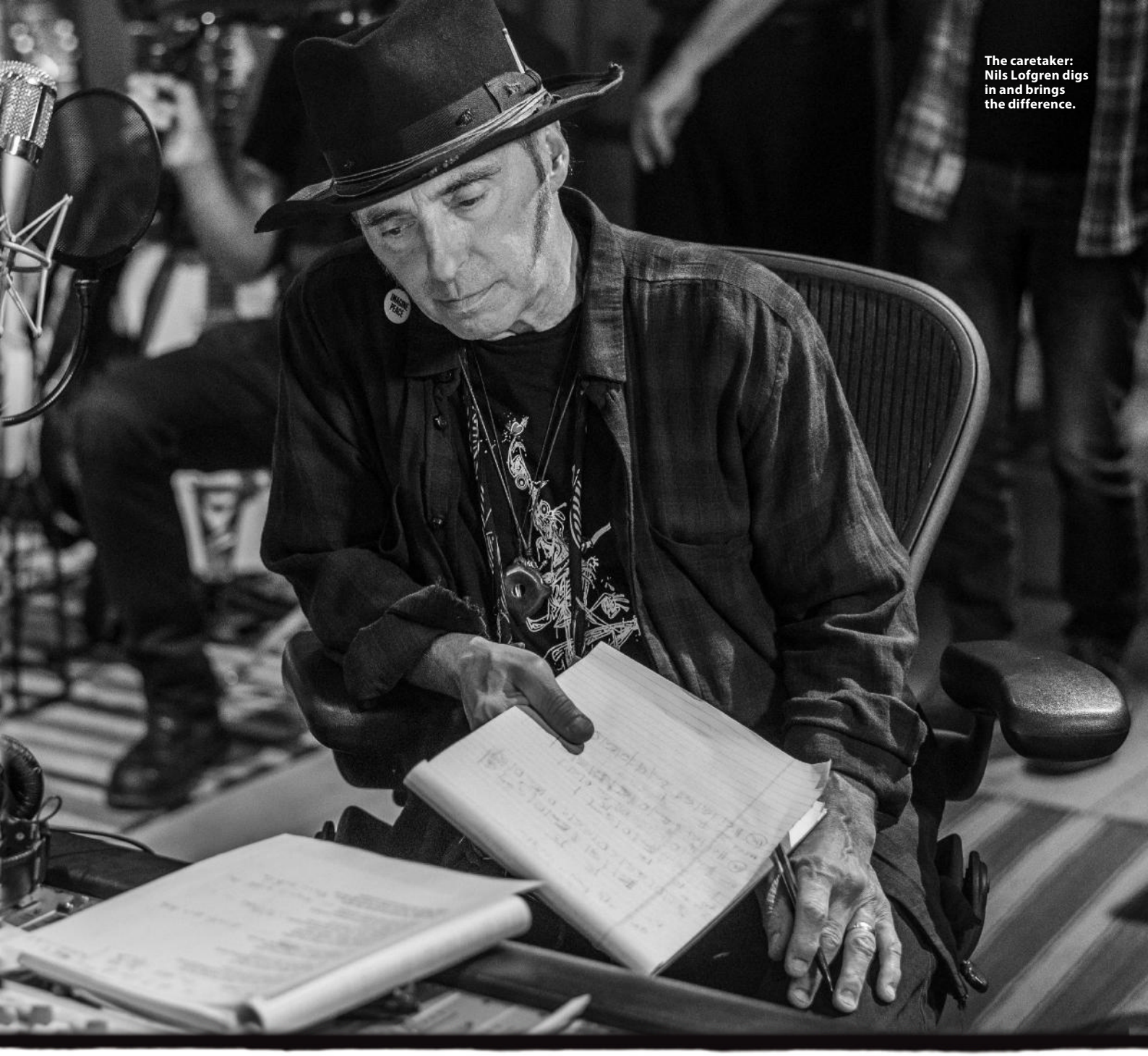
Neil Young & Crazy Horse

★★★★

World Record

(REPRISE, 2022)

A veteran of *After The Gold Rush*, *Tonight's The Night* and *Trans*, Lofgren shines on this return to the Horse's fold. Like *TTN*, this is another album of mourning, this time for a dying planet – the mood carried by his delicate touch and versatility on lap, pedal steel and bottleneck guitar, accordion, dobro, percussion, and vocals. A half century on, Lofgren remains a vital part of Shakey's muse and music.



The caretaker: Nils Lofgren digs in and brings the difference.

“**There was a madness** to *Tonight’s The Night*. But **the music** and the madness **kind of saved us.**”

says, “Mr. Starkey is there anything I can change for you in your monitor?” And I will never forget, he turns to the guy and says, *“What’s a monitor?”* The guy explains, “Oh, we got a PA under your feet,” and Ringo looks down like, “No wonder it sounds so damn good.”

Over the decades you’ve had close working relationships with Neil and Bruce. What do you think it is they saw and continue to see in you?

Bruce and Neil are these revered historic American characters and rockers, but I will say, something the three of us have in common is that they’re swing men – in the sense that they will sit at any keyboard, they will pick up any guitar, a dulcimer or a zither, whatever, and even if they don’t know how to play it they’ll listen to the song and they’ll figure out a great part on the spot. And I think that’s what they like about me. I don’t care – give me a shaker, gimme a tambourine, I will contribute something in my physical scope that might add to the tune. Bruce and Neil, I don’t want to say they’re underrated as guitar players, but they’re underrated as musicians. Because they are so naturally and innately great at picking up anything and within a couple takes having a part that fits. Their instincts are just impeccable.

When the E Street Band reunited in the late-’90s, and Steven Van Zandt rejoined the band, was that an adjustment for you?

When Steve came back into the band, I challenged myself to bring something different. Because you don’t really need three guitar players on every song. I went and took lessons for pedal steel, lap steel, dobro, I got a six-string banjo and learned how to play with the metal [picks] on my fingers. I wanted to put these other sounds in the toolbox. Now, I’m that swing guy for E Street.

As you move between E Street and Crazy Horse, what changes in your approach?

On [2022’s] *World Record* with Crazy Horse, I got my amp and started cranking it, stepping into it more because there was so much space. Ralph [Molina] kept saying, “You don’t have 18 people like in the E Street Band. Play more, step up, be louder.”

Looking back, is there anyone you would have liked a chance to have played with?

Of course, tons – Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin… But I’ve had more than my share of good fortune in the people I’ve played with. From the time where I was a kid playing classical accordion to being a teenager feeling the pull and charm and inspiration of blues guitar to now, music remains a very joyful expression for me. I’ve been blessed with a gift I didn’t ask for – I was given it through my parents’ DNA and some higher power. I don’t even think of it as mine, I’m just caretaking it and trying to do something useful with it. That’s how I’ve always looked at it.

His own creation: John Lydon, in his London flat, March 1981.

BITTEREST PiL

It's been the toughest time for JOHN LYDON – dealing with the illness and death of his wife, Nora. As ever, PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED is the channel for his pain, his anger and, on occasion, his joy. Cue: contempt for the other Pistols and love for Status Quo, on a menu of fear, mischief, laughter and hope. "I have no control over my emotions at all," he tells TOM DOYLE.

MAIN PORTRAIT

Tom Sheehan, Andres Poveda

IT IS MID-MAY, SIX WEEKS SINCE JOHN Lydon's wife of more than four decades, Nora Forster, passed away, following a five-year period in which she suffered from Alzheimer's and Lydon acted as her carer. Yet the ex-Sex Pistol and eternal PiL singer is already back at work. Sat on a sofa at his home near Oxnard, California, surrounded by punky-coloured pink and orange sheepskin cushions, wearing red glasses and a peach and blue checked shirt, his hair shaved at the sides and swept back into a neat quiff, he's clearly relieved to be returning to action. Still, in his first interview since Forster's death, he remains fundamentally deep in grief, and his raw emotions immediately break to the surface. "I'm very nervous," he admits, as his eyes brim. "It's very hard."

Nonetheless, the singer acknowledges that throwing himself back into PiL is essential to his well-being. "Yes," he nods. "It would be a disappointment to those that really matter in my life *not* to…"

But Lydon is nothing if not resilient, and his composure returns – after a sip of ginger beer and a few puffs on a fag – as talk turns to PiL's multi-faceted new album, *End Of World*. Moving back and forth between the dark (brooding groovers Down On The Clown and Strange) and the light (the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band-inspired jazz of Dirty Murky Delight; daft glammy tongue-twister The Do That), it was recorded in English residential studios pre- and post-pandemic, and introduced to the public with Hawaii, the atypically tender ballad written by Lydon about memories of happier times with Forster.

The singer says his wife loved *End Of World* – another factor helping to drive him on. "It made her laugh, and the louder I'd play it, the more she enjoyed it," he beams. "Actually, the least favourite track for her was Hawaii. It might have been a bit too sentimental for her. But, ooh, I'm sure she likes it now (*laughs*)."

That said, it was a wrench to leave Forster behind in California while he was recording.

"This was a very, very difficult album to make for me," he offers. "I was playing the album the other night, and I hadn't played it in a while. I couldn't. I just wasn't right for it. It's the deepest I think I've ever had to write."

One track in particular, the metallic North West Passage, which employs the mythical Atlantic/Pacific sea lane as a metaphor for the journey towards death, finds him ominously ruminating on "barely a future" and wondering, "Could it be the end of my life?" It seems mortality has been on his mind for a while.

"I look back at that song ➢

➢ and I'm wondering, Oh, was I subconsciously thinking about that?" he says. "I do my best to, like, *not* be that way. But I have to question it. And I have to deal with it. I have to face it fully, as a man would and should.

"My mum and dad would never tolerate self-pity," he adds, as his voice gently cracks. "Neither should I. But by God, I'll tell you, it's worth a lot to go through it, too. As long as you see the light at the end of it."

THE SHEER EMOTIONAL POWER OF PIL IS SOMETIMES overlooked. But John Lydon's pain, and catharsis, have been keynotes right from the start: with the venting, accusatory 1978 single Public Image – directed at Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols – and Theme, the opening track of the band's debut album, in which he primally howled, "I wish I could die/I will survive".

"It was just hard… to be disappointed and aggressively inward-looking," he says of the latter song. "I obviously didn't wish I could die. But I was going through those feelings. And I was trying to articulate that. It was ultimately a song of hope. As indeed, I hope everything I do is."

But if Lydon had been battered by his Public Enemy No. 1 status as the singer in the Pistols – and the lack of protection afforded by McLaren's shonky management operation – then further disappointment lay ahead. The brilliant, if problematic original line-up of PiL fractured with the departure of drummer Jim Walker in 1979, before falling apart when bassist Jah Wobble quit after that year's monumental *Metal Box*.

"I expected better out of them," says Lydon. "Whatever they thought was going to happen, like easy money and instant stardom, these were all the things I was not looking for. So I could honestly say my very close friends at that time were reading the situation wrong."

In other words, they thought you were hugely ambitious in terms of being a massive rock star?

"Yeah. The word 'Limited' was absolutely to be applied."

Lydon cites the production of *Metal Box* itself as proof that he was deflecting the spotlight. "We cut the voice down to its bare minimum," he states, "because it was interfering with the tonality of the bass. It was all for the greater benefit, and the feelings and the emotions were tone-driven at that point. But you could get the point without the vocal just riding so heavy over the top."

One exception being Death Disco – the pre-*Metal Box* 45 reworked for the album as Swan Lake. It found Lydon addressing his mother Eileen, dying of cancer. Here was a young man, still in his early twenties, vividly expressing his agony. With tar black humour, he later revealed that his mum had asked him to write a disco song for her funeral. In some ways, it was a grim pre-echo of his current situation.

"Oh yeah, yeah," he nods. "I seem to have been down this path before a few times. But not quite to this degree."

LYDON'S DURABILITY AND DESIRE TO MAINTAIN some version of Public Image Ltd was put to the test when he, guitarist Keith Levene and drummer Martin Atkins convened for the making of the third PiL album, 1981's *The Flowers Of Romance*. While his voice tackled Eastern scales as the sound moved into *musique concrète* and the pummelling, ground-breaking gated reverb drum sound inspired his friend Kate Bush to further explore it on *The Dreaming*, the album endured a troubled creation.

To start with, the singer sacked Town House Studios' in-house engineer, booting him out of the control room and locking the door.

"They couldn't comprehend the sounds that we were looking for," Lydon explains, before assuming a lofty, teacherly tone in imitation of the ousted engineer. "'You can't get that much bass on the record.' My God, we were all brought up with reggae. We know that to be a lie!"

Later, Lydon grew violently frustrated that the rough mixes of the tracks were being smoothed out in the final stages.

"I actually damaged the desk," he grins. "Y'know, I love [rough] mixes. They're just really honest and you get to grips with the hardness and the heart of the song. But, my God, when it goes into 36 tracks, all those coloured buttons and things… they don't do much but absolutely bury everything in 10cc mud, shall we call it?

"I quite happily, in me steel toe cap shoes, walked across the mixing desk and kicked all them knobs off (*laughs*). It sounds like comedy. At the time, it was done with a great deal of hatred in my heart. Because I knew where it was going wrong. They were trying to take us away from the meaning, the clarity of the thing, and cover it in what I call, with overproduced records, *subterfuge*."

More recently, the November 2022 death of Levene has forced Lydon to further reflect on the drug problems and grievances that ended their partnership.

"I never had a vendetta there," he says. "He'd be doing all this negative talk. A lot of it being drug confusion. The poor sod couldn't get away from that. I remember an interview he did years ago where he said, 'Heroin's not a problem. I take it to stay normal.' How can you argue with that? You don't. That's the impenetrable barrier that you cannot get past.

"Y'know, there was a period there where we were very, very good. And that was under control. But then outside influences came into his life and he believed what they were saying. And that was his downfall. So many people in this industry are misled by their alleged friends who are really leading them into this world of drug-fazed confusion."

A thought suddenly occurs, and his eyes twinkle with mischief.

"Now, I've done every drug known to mankind, and if there's a few new ones coming up, I'll have a go there too," he comically gurns. "I ain't no saint, right? Oh no sirree. But I don't let them dominate.

"I have the kind of personality, for better or worse, that gets bored with routine," he adds. "Anything that gets me doing the same thing over and over again, I instinctively have to walk away from."

IF PIL LINE-UPS OF THE PAST TYPICALLY INVOLVED eccentric personalities in precarious arrangements, then the latest – former Damned guitarist Lu Edmonds, ex-Pop Group and Slits drummer Bruce Smith, and the versatile Scott Firth on bass – is by far the most stable. Operating successfully as a touring and recording band since 2009, they've stayed together longer than The Beatles.

"Well, it puts an end to the myth that I'm hard to work with," Lydon chuckles. "We're friends, you see. Very, very close friends. And we can row and shout at each other, and it doesn't turn into a hissy fest. It ends up in a good place because we're not competing for positioning and domination. None of those things count. It's not a love fest, right? It's a reality fest. Much better results."

One *End Of World* standout, LFCF, mirrors PiL's debut single in railing against his former Sex Pistols bandmates. In it, Lydon repeatedly declaims, "You're all liars, fakes, cheats and frauds!" The fuel for this fresh blast of ire was his public wrangle with Steve Jones, Paul Cook and Glen Matlock over his attempts to block the band's songs being used in 2022's Hulu/Disney+ mini-series, Pistol. The others, pointing to a 1998 contract that appeared to allow for majority decisions, overruled him.

"To think you can erase me completely…" he fumes. "Him what gave you your image, wrote your songs, and just turf that out and go for, 'You're getting in the way of selling new T-shirts.' It's a sad state of affairs. Very sad."

Did he watch Pistol?

"Yes, I had to. It was grim, grim watching. To see those boys throw away their legacy really, really hurts."

Did he feel it had any redeeming qualities?

"None."

Isn't there an irony that, despite his opposition, he stands to earn decent royalties off the back of it?

"There's no hope for that," he sighs. "You expect decent accounting? (*laughs witheringly*) The premise is a lie. They'll say it didn't do as good as they were expecting. Because there really isn't this enormous audience that are so desperate to be lied to." ➢

Getty (3), Daniel Gonçalves/Guardian/Eyevine, Rob Browne

The flowers of romance: Nora and John, 1986; (below, clockwise) Lydon at home, Los Angeles, May 2022; Lydon with PiL-mate Jah Wobble, 1978; with his parents Eileen and John, January 24, 1978; with PiL's Keith Levene, 1981.

"The album made Nora laugh, and the louder I'd play it, the more she enjoyed it."

LYDON ON END OF WORLD

C'est la vie: (clockwise from left) Lydon does philosophical, 2012; recording at Vada Studios, Warwickshire, 2022; Status Quo "thriving for life"; PiL on-stage, London, June 16, 2022.

"I walked across the mixing desk and kicked all them knobs off. It was done with a great deal of hatred in my heart."

LYDON ON FLOWERS OF ROMANCE

Lydon has, of course, been here before. His struggles with the misrepresentation of the Pistols began with McLaren's self-mythologising account in Julien Temple's 1980 film, The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle. But the singer insists that being forced to battle these false impressions has never shaken his sense of identity.

"No, because I found it to be rather useful," he says. "While people are busy confusing themselves [with] just basic, outright lies and fabrications, I can have a quiet life. They don't realise they're doing me such a favour."

The making of Pistol against his will was clearly the final straw in relations between Lydon and his former bandmates.

"They've coffined themselves," he declares. "They don't need my forgiveness. They've made their decision. Them as people, I don't need them in my life."

The '70s punk era is also reflected in *End Of World*'s rollicking Pretty Awful, as Lydon recalls sniffy reactions to the fashions of the period, while at the same time remembering the Sex Pistols' April 1976 appearance at seedy Soho establishment El Paradise.

"Of course, it was a porno cinema," he explains, eyebrows raised. "We got there early, before we could set up our equipment and there was all these old boys in wanker's macs watching these films (*laughs*). And it left a really seedy but wonderful impression on me.

"There's many references all over that song but ultimately, it's not a put-down. The ideology of what punk girls were doing then was really amazing and brilliant and self-efficient of them. A bin liner worn by a girl will always have style."

Lydon remains opposed to the standard punk narrative in other ways. Aforementioned Bonzos homage Dirty Murky Delight, he says, reveals more about his formative influences. "I loved Viv Stanshall. Absolutely Britain at its finest. I love the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band and if anybody really wants to know who was a great influence on punk, it would be them."

Furthermore, he has absolutely no truck with the notion that he was inspired by the Ramones. "The Americans seem to have cornered the market in lying about what punk is," he insists. "There's no animosity to the Ramones at all. Sid loved them. But I would

prefer Status Quo. I thought it was, like, purer. I loved to stick my head in the PA when Quo were [playing] live, right? I don't think the Ramones created quite that thriving for life."

IN RECENT YEARS, JOHN LYDON HAS CHALLENGED public perceptions of himself by making himself more available, both to fans and detractors. PiL gigs these days often involve pre-show meet and greets; there have been book tours to promote his 2015 memoir, Anger Is An Energy, and 2017 lyrics collection Mr Rotten's Songbook. Another, a delayed voyage around his 2020 volume of ruminations, I Could Be Wrong, I Could Be Right, kicks off in the UK in May 2024.

"They're so enjoyable," he says, "because you really are up close, and people will tell you their personal tragedies, too. And the sharing of that… it just always ends up in joy. It's the most amazing piece of free psychiatry one could ask for.

"I used to say when I was younger, 'Oh, the hardest thing in the world is to be yourself.' Well, it is if you're trying to project a false image. I think over the years, I've learned to get rid of the falseness. I've really not got time for lying."

At the same time, he acknowledges that some folk are scared to meet "Johnny Rotten", while others come with a premeditated plan to antagonise him.

"Yeah, of course. But you've got to break down that starstruck thing because that's false idolatry. Even the one per cent that ultimately totally hate ya, they realise about halfway through a conversation that you're actually giving them great joy to vent their spleen. Those moments are really extremely rewarding… when you catch them going, '*Oh*…'"

Weirder still are the John Lydon tattoos some fans insist on showing him.

"There's a major PiL fanatic called Claude and he has [my] full face on his entire back," he says. "It's very good. But it's very creepy because he's got quite a hairy back (*laughs*). I don't think it's worship. I think it's just the enjoyment we bring to him. Because we deal with subjects that matter to him."

AS OUR TIME TOGETHER NEARS ITS END, Lydon sparks up another cigarette and exhales with relief. Talking to MOJO today, he says, has temporarily lifted him out of his mourning. "You've got me laughing," he says. "You've helped me…"

Looking to the future, Lydon envisages an intensification of PiL activity.

"It's not like I'm forced back into it. There's a true eagerness. I now have to have a different overview as to what my world is. I'm without a dependent, which I miss very, very much, but I have to now accept that. I'm certainly not gonna wallow in misery. Not at all. No, quite the opposite. My babby has given me a gift here. I'll not abuse it.

"But it's *very* difficult right now in the house that we lived in so happily together," he admits. "To be here alone… it's very, very strange."

Not that for one second he's considering quitting California and moving back to London.

"No. I just think if I lived back in London, it would be overwhelmingly depressing for me. I wouldn't have that sense of space that I so require."

And so to the immediate future: the release of *End Of World* and a two-month-long UK/European tour starting in September. Lydon confesses he's slightly nervous about the prospect of the latter.

"As always, worried, scared," he says. "The fear of letting people down. Hoping that I can control some of my emotions. But at the same time, the sheer joy of me being on-stage is that I have no control over my emotions at all. It's the most wonderful thing I've found in my alleged career."

Ultimately, then, it sounds as if the next phase of PiL may well be the most cathartic yet in the creative life of John Joseph Lydon.

"The only way I know how to do it," he concludes, "is just get in front of a microphone and let *rip* and tell it as it is."

Getty (2)

THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT...

A classic modern PiL set list, annotated by *PiL*.

PUBLIC IMAGE

(from Public Image: First Issue, 1978)

Lydon lambasts McLaren and the Pistols.

Lu Edmonds: "When I first heard it, I was laughing. I just thought, They're having a good time. One of their strengths was they never had [enough] studio time. They had to pull it out of thin air."

Bruce Smith: "It's tricky to play live at times. You get the touch right and then it really bounces."

DEATH DISCO

(Single, 1979)

Stark howl of despair addressed to Lydon's dying mum.

Scott Firth: "Because it's one groove that goes along for a long time, it can be almost jazz, the way we approach it. I don't know how John does it every night, singing about his mum dying. It's quite an emotional thing for him. It can be really intense. Unless we fuck it up (*laughs*)."

MEMORIES

(from Metal Box, 1979)

Relentless groove, dubby bass, dislocated guitar: *sui generis* PiL.

BS: "When we gathered to start doing these songs in 2009, we tried most of the songs from *Metal Box*. Albatross is always an epic, and like Memories, is never the same twice."

LE: "That's another one of these very open-ended songs. It's sort of flamenco… E major to F major."

THIS IS NOT A LOVE SONG

(from This Is What You Want… This Is What You Get, 1984)

Snarky response to Virgin asking for a hit produces a UK Number 5.

BS: "We developed a whole range of different stuff for Love Song that is *completely* different from the record. Perhaps the listeners don't immediately realise what it is until you hit the chorus."

LE: "I put in a little figure, like a *montuno*, which is what they call it in Cuba, which was never on the original."

RISE

(from Album, 1986)

PiL's greatest anthem, built around an unfailingly rousing chant.

BS: "Who doesn't like chanting 'anger is an energy'? We played it once in Serbia and they were entirely emotionally engaged."

LE: "We played it in Brazil, 34 years ago, and the PA went off, and the crowd just kept singing and singing it. The electricity came back on, we just went back into it, and they went totally insane."

THE BODY

(from Happy?, 1987)

Loping standout from first PiL album to feature Smith and Edmonds.

BS: "It started with the guitar pattern that John [McGeoch] had around the drumbeat I did, and then went along from there."

LE: "There was an insane video we made for it in a disused hospital, with lots of people dressed as nurses and in rubber and leather and stuff."

DISAPPOINTED

(from 9, 1989)

Freed from its dated '80s production, a current PiL live favourite.

BS: "John McGeoch had a lot of musical ideas. There was a certain amount of tension with where John [Lydon] and myself were coming from, which was like, 'We don't need all those chord changes.'"

LE: The album was very McGeoch-y. He was fantastic. He had such a good brain for loads of overdubs."

THE ROOM I AM IN

(from This Is PiL, 2012)

Atmospheric spoken worder concerning unexplained isolation.

LE: "I've never asked John what any of his words mean. But I would say it's something to do with someone stuck in a council estate, in a room, with drugs, with hopeless despair. And then trying to come to terms with that and seeing ways out."

SF: "When we get the atmosphere right, it can be really spooky."

SHOOM

(from What The World Needs Now…, 2015)

Six-minute-long electronic thumper topped with string of expletives.

BS: I think it's a work of absolute genius. I remember when we were in the studio, and John did the lyric, Lu and I were falling around laughing."

SF: "That's great fun to play. It was fun knocking it up in the studio. What's not to like? 'Fuck off!'"

LFCF

(from End Of World, 2023)

Lydon comes nose-to-nose (again) with his erstwhile Pistols bandmates.

BS: "I don't think I was aware immediately what it was about. John's a very good writer. He'll write words and then trim them down and it's always very personal."

SF: "It came together like they all do. They start with panic that we haven't got anything and then gradually they just emerge from the ether."

MOJO PRESENTS

The silken voice and lonesome guitar of JULIE BYRNE had sped her on the road to stardom. Then came the sudden death of her closest ally. Would a path through tragedy reveal itself? "There will never be a time where part of me won't be grieving," she tells GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN.

Photography by **TONJE THILESEN**

JULIE BYRNE BEGAN HER THIRD ALBUM, *THE GREATER WINGS*, FOR THE SECOND time over a bowl of gummy worms and a pot of highly caffeinated tea.

It was September 2021, more than five years since Byrne put the record's first words to paper. When she started that song, Flare, she remained a rather obscure singer-songwriter living in Queens and working as a ranger in New York's Central Park. She was still months away from releasing her second album and career breakthrough, *Not Even Happiness*, a hushed nine-song meditation on her romantic roaming. "I crossed the country, and I carried no key," she sang on that album, her wispy voice a feint for an unwavering sense of self. "Couldn't I look up at the stars from anywhere?"

But when Byrne came to rest after two years of consensus praise and steady touring in 2019, self-doubt ballooned. "Part of me felt convinced I wouldn't be able to amount in some way to what I had done," says Byrne, sat in her New York apartment on a scorching spring afternoon. "That was a road I had to walk down, because there was no way through."

As 2020 slid into 2021, Byrne left Los Angeles, where she'd been living off and on, for Chicago, huddling in the little eighth-floor apartment of multi-instrumentalist and sound engineer Eric Littmann. From the moment they met in early 2014, the pair's relationship had progressed from romance to unwavering collaboration and trust. She knew he could help.

"With Eric, I was able to show up, truly as I was," remembers Byrne, who speaks with the same patience ➢

Tonje Thilesen

Spreading her wings: "I don't want to be defined by my grief," says Julie Byrne.

Out of the blue: (clockwise from left) performing with the late Eric Littmann, SXSW Festival, Austin, Texas, March 14, 2017; outside a trailer; reclaiming "gorgeous and wild" in 2023; the Caravan East sign on Route 66, inspiration for the song Death Is A Diamond.

"WITH ERIC, I WAS ABLE TO SHOW UP, TRULY AS I WAS. HIS FAITH IN WHAT WE WERE TRYING TO ACHIEVE WAS STEADFAST."

Julie Byrne

and care with which she sings. "He saw me at my lowest points, but his faith in what we were trying to achieve was steadfast. That meant everything."

Byrne intended to stay for a week, working at night after Littmann's shifts as a leading bioinformatics researcher at the University of Chicago. As she crashed on the couch, their ideas and songs mounted. In the end, she stayed for months, writing and building the bulk of a record. That momentum vanished when Littmann died suddenly that June.

Byrne did not touch their efforts for some time, focusing more on survival than deadlines. But nine months after she had arrived at Littmann's home, and less than three since he'd passed, she sat with those gummy worms, that tea, and a puppy named Moon in the lush little LA backyard of producer Alex Somers.

They'd met years earlier at a festival in the Arizona desert. She felt she knew him through his solo recordings and music with Sigur Rós's Jónsi Birgisson. She sensed a "softness and patience" to Somers, a combination she needed. The time had come, after all, to approach those songs again, to start the process of finishing. "It was one of the last pieces of work Eric made in this world," she says. "There was never a doubt in my mind I would find a way."

On that first day, Somers and Byrne mostly talked. Then they moved into his home studio to listen to her drafts. He lit some candles, and they sang together. "It was a really powerful connection," says Somers. "We wanted to crystallise something that mattered, that could reach other people outside ourselves."

A year after that first meeting, following sessions in upstate New York and Somers' own studio, *The Greater Wings* was done. Mostly re-recorded after Littmann's death, it feels more a testament to life than a trove of loss, an ode to moving through suffering toward an unknowable future.

"The sheer fact that we were meeting in this place and writing and recording and re-recording was an act of defiance," Somers tells MOJO. "We all want to show up for each other and make something out of nothing. Just doing it shows the record is about resilience and living."

Producer Alex Somers: "the record is about resilience and living."

BYRNE WAS RAISED ON THE EDGE OF THE Buffalo, NY suburb of East Aurora, just as the town gave way to a sweep of farms. A railroad that connected the mills and factories of her Rust Belt burgh passed below her childhood home, set on a hillside. She'd often stroll along the tracks into town for her job at a Salvation Army outpost.

When Byrne was 17, she started playing an acoustic guitar that belonged to her father, a weekend wedding singer whose advancing multiple sclerosis forced him to set the instrument aside. Her loping fingerpicking style became an inheritance, learned from a childhood spent listening to him. Within two years, she was shuttling to New York City to play shows, her songs marked by a sense of exurban reverie. "I had much more capacity," she admits, "for slowness."

Her 2014 debut, *Rooms With Walls And Windows*, felt like a lost transmission from the erstwhile freak-folk frontier, as if delayed for a decade by music industry machinations. She had rambled after leaving home, with stints in cities across the country and self-booked tours where she'd sell a small-issue cassette. Dotted with details of seashores and sunsets that seemed plucked from the pages of a traveller's journals, her amorphous songs suggested secret transmissions accidentally caught on tape.

Two months after its release, Byrne met Littmann in Texas. They soon moved in together in New York, their partnership immediate and all-consuming. She'd never really had a close collaborator, so her solitary craft made sudden room for some-

Getty (2), rZxMedia

MAJOR BYRNES

Her albums so far, by **Grayson Haver Currin**.

ROOMS WITH WALLS AND WINDOWS

★★★

(Orindal, 2014)

Byrne's debut was a playground of imaginative ideas and narcoticised motifs, seemingly imported from the vestiges of the New Weird American underground. Quoting Frank O'Hara and invoking Marissa Nadler and Grouper, its 42 minutes were a room flooded in strange sepia haze, all enchanting and ephemeral.

NOT EVEN HAPPINESS

★★★★★

(Ba Da Bing/Basin Rock, 2017)

Byrne followed the thread of fingerpicked splendour, penning a series of slowly loping songs that decried the city's suffocation as she daydreamed about wider horizons, some of which she'd already seen. Love quaked beneath the surface, as if she had arrived at a welcome destination.

THE GREATER WINGS

★★★★

(Ghostly International, 2023)

Byrne's third will long seem inseparable from its story, but it is a remarkable ode to risk, trust, and the future, despite its complicated past. Wrapped in careful filigrees of harp, strings, and synths, Byrne's voice continues to evolve, as if gathering strength from circumstances that would break many.

one else. "There was this sense of commitment, so it felt like there were lifetimes shared between us," Byrne says.

They recorded *Not Even Happiness* in the basement of her childhood home, overlooking the valley with the railroad tracks – nine bright songs that surrounded Byrne's fingerpicking with the flickering warmth of Littmann's electronics. If making music had once seemed like a way for Byrne to remain in motion, here was a newfound attachment and devotion.

"Some of these songs, I'm playing them hundreds of times, maybe more, as a writing practice, waiting for the lines to come," she says, with a surprising chuckle. "It's almost like summoning."

AFTER HER TIME WITH LITTMANN IN CHICAGO IN 2021, Byrne decamped to the high desert of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Its Southwestern sprawl had beckoned since her performances at a long-gone punk space called Gold House nearly a decade earlier. She rented an apartment and began plotting a long-term move there.

One night that June, a pit bull trained to fight attacked a friend's dog, "a beautiful, majestic husky named Posey." During a late rush to an emergency veterinarian, she spotted a sign for a long-running nightclub along Route 66, Caravan East. The bar was long gone, but local artists had turned the lingering marquee into a revolving installation, adding evocative messages in blocky black letters. "FOR YOU, ANYTHING," it now read.

"The first time this phrase entered my consciousness, it was with the vision of this demolition site behind it," she says. "It represented this feeling of going all the way to the end with someone, how even death does not take them from you."

Byrne slipped the phrase into Death Is The Diamond, a piano dirge about the long odds of survival she'd been writing for months. Littmann died weeks later. The marquee's wisdom now felt like some cosmic gift. The next time she saw the sign, the message was gone, and a library now stands in the Caravan East's stead. (Posey, by the way, is fine.)

Other fragments arrived steadily, as if indeed summoned. On the eight-month anniversary of Littmann's passing, for instance, Byrne received an email from Emily Fontana, one of his former co-workers at NY's Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Fontana used the phrase "gorgeous and wild," prompting Byrne to revisit Flare, that song she'd started writing in 2016 but never finished.

She was already mixing several tunes with Somers, but these words felt significant, especially since Littmann had been such a generous letter writer. "Grant us one more hour, gorgeous and wild," Byrne sings, her voice rising alongside a tide of strings. It feels like a plea for permanence, weighted by the knowledge that no such thing exists.

"Those final lyrics have meant the most to me," she says. "It took the longest to reach, but the answer was collaborative, from our correspondence."

FOR BYRNE, THE SPIRIT OF PARTNERSHIP LITTMANN helped cultivate in her work will survive. The tone of her voice lifts as she lists all the people she still plays with that he knew or mentored, how relationships they fostered together continue to bloom. Byrne's earliest music hinged so often on travelling alone, but Littmann helped her let others in, despite the fact that they too will one day disappear. That risk is the crux of *The Greater Wings*.

"There will never be a time where part of me won't be grieving," Byrne says, pausing after every few words. "But I don't want to be defined by my grief, and I don't want our work to be defined by grief, either. The songs come from our life together – not just mine and Eric's, but the people we've loved."

Songs in the key of life: Paul Simon ponders "the enormity of everything" on *Seven Psalms*, 2023.

Myrna Suarez

"I Don't Think This Is My Final Piece"

Seven Psalms' exquisite ruminations on late life and what, if anything, lies beyond have turned more heads than any Paul Simon album since _Graceland_. Not that the master craftsman of song asked for the praise, or would even know what to do with it. "I'm used to the fact that a lot of what I'm doing, people don't get," he tells David Fricke.

Photograph by Myrna Suarez

THE DREAM WAS SO VIVID, SO specific in its instruction, that when Paul Simon woke up, he wrote it down – two words on a page torn from a spiral-bound notebook – and dated it in the upper-right corner: January 15, 2019. Eventually, the singer framed that paper, hanging it in the studio at his home in Texas where – largely in isolation; through lockdown, his own bout with Covid and a severe loss of hearing in his left ear – Simon composed and recorded seven new songs, tied together in an unbroken suite and titled, as directed, after that message in the night.

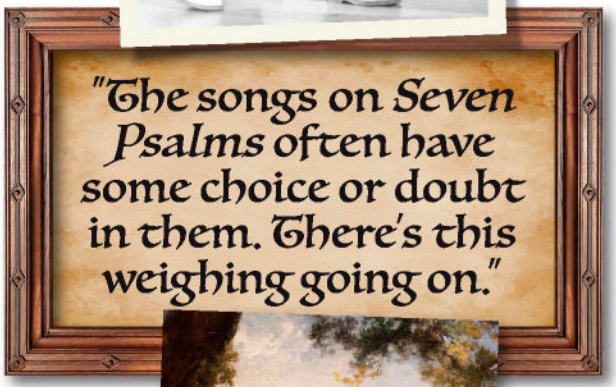
➢ "It said, 'You are writing this piece called Seven Psalms,'" Simon recalls, laughing, because he wasn't writing anything at the time. Five months earlier, in September 2018, the singer performed the final concert on his farewell tour, named Homeward Bound after his 1966 hit with Simon & Garfunkel, in a New York City park 20 minutes by bicycle from where he grew up in Queens. "I was done with that," he says of the road. "I'd taken it as far as it could go."

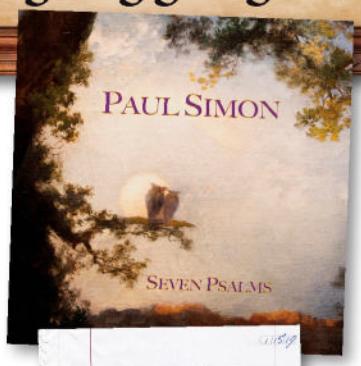
That the dream came soon after "may just be coincidental, because my creative cycle seems to be about every three years," suggests Simon, whose last album of new, original material, *Stranger To Stranger*, was released in 2016. "I start to make up stuff, whether I intend to or not. In this case, I didn't intend to do it."

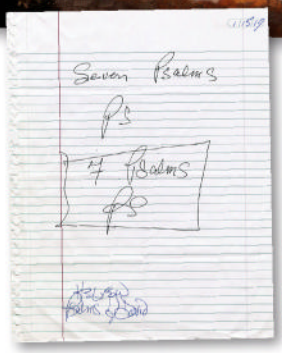
The result – Simon's 15th studio album as a solo artist – was released on May 19. Despite a distinct lack of promo (there have been few interviews so far), it has been a sensation – critically, and in terms of word-of-mouth. At once vigorously experimental and delicately executed, his grainy, whispered vocals and solitary acoustic guitar are wreathed in pictorial atmospheres of percussion, keyboards and lightly applied orchestration. It's an extraordinary fusion of reflection, searching and understated nerve, evoking Simon's mid-'60s spell in Britain – an American pilgrim immersed in that country's folk revival, just before stardom came around for Simon & Garfunkel – in songs that address nothing less than what Simon, 81, calls "the enormity of everything."

The day after that dream, Simon tells MOJO, sat in his Texas studio, "I said, 'I'm going to look up 'psalm' and see actually what this is.' So I went to the Bible."

The psalms – from the Greek for "songs accompanied by a stringed instrument" – are poems of praise and thanksgiving shared by the Hebrew Tanakh and Christian Old Testament, some rather more bellicose than "The Lord is my shepherd…" Initially, Simon wondered how he would write anything in the same vein. "But then I thought, How literal do I need to be with the definition of 'psalm'? That was a good decision," the singer says firmly. "Because it freed me to go wherever I wanted."







Your dream showed up just before the world went into lockdown. How hard was it for you to keep working through Covid, then your hearing loss?

The imposed quiet was helpful. The rest of the world was not doing anything. I didn't think, This person is doing that, that person just wrote this. There was no temptation to compare. I began to write, kicked off by the dream, and for a year or so, everything flowed quite naturally. I thought, This is just a gift. This is too easy. Then the words started to come, a lot of it in dreams again, which is not typical for me. But I thought, I'm the recipient of this information. I'm just putting it down.

Everything was going swimmingly until I started to lose my hearing – gradually at first, then more rapidly. [Simon underwent surgery on his left ear; the procedure unfortunately worsened the loss.] By then, I was another year into it. I had quite a lot written. I started to see a form. The editing part of my brain said, This will be the main theme. This should follow that. I don't know where this goes yet. Just leave it out for now.

In My Professional Opinion, the most topical song on the record, you sing, "So all rise to the occasion/Or all sink to despair." How real was that urgency for you, especially with your hearing loss – to get this record done?

The songs often have some choice or doubt in them, like in Your Forgiveness – "I have my reasons to doubt." In Love Like A Braid, I go, "Love is like a braid, some say/And I don't disbelieve it." It's not someone who says, "I believe it." There's this weighing going on – thinking about how you really feel about something, knowing that where you come down is not necessarily the right answer. Or is there a right answer? Any of these things – you try to say it in a song without being preachy. And without pretending that you know more than the listener, because you don't. To me, the most spiritual aspect of the whole record is the sound of the music.

In footage of you in the studio, working on the album, you play multiple instruments and guide the other musicians in precise detail. Do you feel underrated as a producer? To most people, you are a singer-songwriter – and that's it.

I have no idea whether I'm underrated or overrated. It doesn't profit me to think about it. The thing that matters is what problem I'm solving. Anything that distracts me from that – and a lot of things do – is not to my advantage. I'm not immune to distraction. I'm susceptible to it. The problems I pick to solve are at the edge of my ability to solve them. That's why I'm working hard at it. I'm struggling to find an answer.

I have my own estimation of how good or not good I am. It's probably pretty harsh, actually. But it's my estimation, and at the end of the day, whatever anybody says – I'm a genius or I'm just bullshit – doesn't matter. I'm used to the fact that a lot of what I'm doing, people don't get, like using the overtones of a bell to attach to a certain note. It takes the fun away if I tell you what it is.

If a whole bunch of people say, "Oh, he was underrated," then, boom, I'll be overrated (*laughs*). What's the difference, really?

THE TIMING WAS POIGNANT. The dream that triggered *Seven Psalms* came to Simon on the anniversary of his father's death in 1995. But Louis Simon was not a spiritual man, according to his son.

Born in 1941 in Newark, New Jersey and raised in Flushing, Queens when his family moved there four years later, Paul and his younger brother Eddie grew up in a Jewish home where religion was "not a factor," says the singer. Their father, a bassist and dance-band leader for most of his life, was in his fifties when he went back to school and got a PhD in linguistics, becoming a professor at City College in New York. "He wasn't interested in religion," Paul remembers. "He was maybe even antagonistic towards it. And I really had no interest in it."

But once Simon and his Queens schoolmate Art Garfunkel graduated from cutting puppy-love pop in the manner of a New York Everly Brothers (Hey Schoolgirl, their 1957 single as Tom & Jerry, made it just inside the US Top 40) and became a folk act, they found some of their earliest material in hymns and gospel tunes. On the 1964 debut, *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, Simon & Garfunkel covered Benedictus, written by the Italian Renaissance composer Orlando di Lasso, and the black-church standard Go Tell It On The Mountain. And Simon wrote his biggest hit with Garfunkel, 1970's Bridge Over Troubled Water, as a hymn of sacrifice and comforting, about the urgency to help and heal – what religion does at its best.

"Benedictus was Artie's idea – he loved that piece," Simon recalls. "But my interest in gospel music came from the vocal groups. They were related in sound to street-corner *a cappella* music, which was the first music that I ever participated in when I was 12, 13 years old."

Simon would later record with some of those idols, singing ➢

Getty (2)

Old friends: Art Garfunkel and Paul Simon take a cigarette break, New York, 1968; (opposite page) cartoon characters: Garfunkel (left) and Simon as Tom & Jerry, 1957; Simon's new LP *Seven Psalms* and the note he wrote after the title came in a dream.

with the Dixie Hummingbirds and Claude Jeter of the Swan Silvertones on 1973's *There Goes Rhymin' Simon*. But even as a teenager, he insists, "I was already in that aspect of the culture – and the spiritual implication in there."

How would you characterise your spirituality on *Seven Psalms*?

The larger questions that all religions address – they fascinate me like they fascinate most people. In one song, Love Is Like A Braid, the bridge is "Home, home/Sun on my doorstep/ Shocks me to find…" That comes from a Hindu chant – "Om Shakti Om" [a mantra for attaining bliss and enlightenment]. Those sounds, *om* and *shak*, are part of the sonic environment. You get transported to the place where you find the answers to these questions.

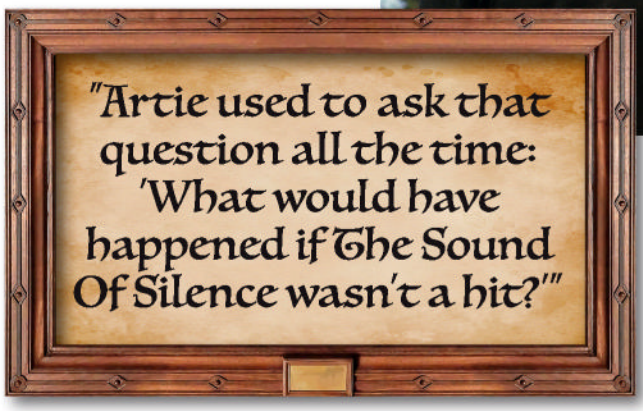
***Seven Psalms* opens like a call to worship with that soft gong-like sound of the Cloud-Chamber Bowls, invented by the microtonal composer Harry Partch.**

When I wrote Insomniac's Lullaby [on *Stranger To Stranger*], I went to this school in New Jersey, Montclair State, where quite a few of his instruments were being kept. I sampled all of the Cloud bowls – individual notes, clusters. I used some of them on that song. And we floated these things across the tracks on *Seven Psalms*, just in an aleatory way to hear what worked: "That's good, keep it right there." "No, that's clutter." The tracks put you in this trance, a place where what I was saying lyrically had a chance to be received in the right context.

You've even programmed the album like a trip – a single half-hour piece.

The record is 33 minutes long, purposefully. Thirty three is a very big number in Christianity [Jesus's age when he was crucified; the number of times God's name appears in the creation story in the Book of Genesis]. And it's the LP speed. All of that is designed.

While I was doing this, I would think, Yeah, I believe that. I'll stand by that statement. Now, is it *really* true? Like, "I lived a life of pleasant sorrows/Until the real deal came along" [Love Is Like A Braid]? Other times, something like, "The Lord is my engineer" – yeah, "engineer" having a lot of meanings. Even, as a half-joke, recording.



You have characterised the album as "a journey [that] I haven't completed. It's all about an argument I'm having with myself about belief – to have it or not."

My overall view is: I am awestruck by this incredible planet that we live on, how beautiful it is and how beautiful it can be. If it was made by a Creator, "Excellent job, God. I'm very impressed. I tip my hat to you." If it turned out that the explanation is something other than a Creator, I'm just as awestruck. It doesn't change my sense of right or wrong or morality.

If you say, "You must pick one or the other," I'd say, "I pick the Creator. I like that story better." But if it's not, I'm not gonna say, "Oh, what a jerk I was to pick the wrong thing." We don't know the answers to the big questions, and we will never really know. But we keep finding little bits of information that bring us closer to something.

There is also the issue of ageing, of looking back at what you got right and wrong along the way. You were writing about that with Simon & Garfunkel on 1968's Bookends Theme: "Preserve your memories/They're all that's left you."

I had a couple of times when I actually ran into [New York Yankees baseball legend] Joe DiMaggio. And that was his favourite line on the album, his favourite song. It wasn't Mrs Robinson [Simon mentions DiMaggio in that song's final verse]. It was fascinating that he told me that, because he wasn't very forthcoming to people.

I'm not inured to getting angry about the state of things or frustrated with my life. But overall, the big picture is, yeah, what a great time. And the questions you can't answer – the mind can't grasp infinity. It's too big. You can only laugh at it. The nice thing about hearing the right kind of music is it allows you to drift into that world of thought without being frightened or agitated by it. The antidote to much of what's going on now is art that is aware but soothing.

Getty (7)

Rhymin' Simon: (clockwise from top left) Paul and future wife Carrie Fisher, London, 1980; Simon & Garfunkel have a bright future ahead of them, 1965; *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* producer Tom Wilson, 1967; "kind of a legend" Davy Graham, 1966; Simon performing on-stage in 1980; posing with the South African musicians who played on *Graceland*, London, 1987; Simon with baby Harper in 1973, his son from his first marriage to Peggy Harper.

ON JUNE 15, 1965 AT THE COLUMBIA RECORDS studio on 7th Avenue in New York City, after Bob Dylan's first day's work there on his next single, Like A Rolling Stone, producer Tom Wilson had two of the musicians – guitarist Al Gorgoni and drummer Bobby Gregg – stay behind to work on another song along with veteran studio guitarist Vinnie Bell and bassist Bob Bushnell, an alumnus of dates for The Drifters and Gary Lewis & The Playboys. Wilson wanted to put electric backing on a song he had produced for Simon & Garfunkel's *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*: the original acoustic reading of Simon's protest ballad The Sound Of Silence.

The album had been a stiff, but that track was picking up college airplay and Wilson, pouncing on the folk rock furore caused by The Byrds' Mr Tambourine Man, remixed it with AM radio in mind – unbeknownst to Simon or Garfunkel. The latter was at another Columbia – the university, studying for a degree in art history. Simon was in London on his solo-folk sabbatical, making his debut solo album, *The Paul Simon Songbook*, that summer – nearly half of it in the same week as Wilson's hit-seasoning session.

On September 12, The Sound Of Silence was released by Columbia, rapidly on its way to a seesaw month at Number 1 in the US chart, alternating with The Beatles' We Can Work It Out. Simon & Garfunkel were soon back together in the Columbia studios, rushing to complete their next LP, to be called *Sounds Of Silence*. Among the 10 Simon songs was a lone cover at the end of Side One, an instrumental souvenir from Simon's British sojourn: Davy Graham's Angi, retitled Anji

In my MOJO review of *Seven Psalms* [MOJO 356] I described that guitar figure in the opening track, The Lord, as a "modal-corkscrew image" of Angi/Anji. How did you come up with that lick?

I don't know the answer to where things come from.

But you recognised the lineage when it came.

Oh, sure. That's where I learned fingerpicking guitar, on the English folk scene. Before that, I always played with a flat pick. And I knew Davy Graham. I wouldn't say he was my friend. He was older, kind of a legend. But I knew him and Bert Jansch – he was a friend, a contemporary. I learned a lot of picking from Martin Carthy. I do something different now on *Seven Psalms* – it's really mine. But I came out of that time.

I never left the acoustic guitar. Even with the African guitarists on [1986's] *Graceland*, I was usually playing acoustic, putting a shimmer on top of what they were playing. And all of the Simon & Garfunkel records are acoustic guitar: those opening licks and identifying fills like Homeward Bound, The Sound Of Silence, Mrs Robinson, I Am A Rock. It's evocative of who I was to people who go far enough back. On another level, it's intrinsically good and interesting.

***Seven Psalms* also has a spare, intimate quality that goes back to *The Paul Simon Songbook*, which was just you in a London studio with an acoustic guitar and the songs you were writing on that trip.**

Seven Psalms is very much related to that. Yeah, that was me as a kid. And this is me 58 years older. I'm still that person.

I get pleasure out of the thought that the profession I chose, songwriting, is thousands of years old (*laughs*). People have been doing it since the earliest human expression. With an acoustic guitar and a voice, *Seven Psalms* is as simple as it gets.

But it's an illusion too. I'm incorporating Harry Partch, his thinking – those 43 microtones in an octave – into this simple guitar. And I'm introducing dissonance, quite a bit. It's stretching the ear back to the horizon of the sound, saying, "There's a lot of interesting things back here." In a sense, this record was made for the '60s when people had big sound systems.

What did you hope to find or achieve during your time on the British folk scene?

I hoped to get away from home, to be free. I was living a free existence and doing the thing that I liked most, which was playing. And I was able to earn a living at it. So I loved it.

I had no intentions. I was a kid. I'm 23, 24 years old. I'm writing songs, playing in clubs that have 60, 70 people, and I'm having a great time. When I left [in late 1965], I was getting paid 25 pounds a night, an enormous sum of money. The average working man's salary was like 37 pounds a week. And I was doing three or four shows a week, making 75 or a hundred pounds.

◅ I could take a taxi, go anywhere I wanted. I could move into a nice apartment, although my favourite apartment was the first one I got. It was seven pounds a week. It was in London, in Belsize Park. That was Martin Carthy's apartment. He gave it to me when he got married and moved to another place.

Have you ever wondered what might have happened, what you would be doing now, if Tom Wilson hadn't put those electric overdubs on The Sound Of Silence? There might not have been a Simon & Garfunkel after that first album.

There's no doubt about that. But it's funny. Artie used to ask that question all the time: "What would have happened if The Sound Of Silence wasn't a hit?" And my answer is the same to you: I never think about it. Because he *did* overdub it. It *was* a hit. And that's that (*laughs*). It's a waste to think about what would have happened if he hadn't done that. This is what happened to your life.

SIMON WAS TWICE MARRIED (TO PEGGY HARPER, then Carrie Fisher) and divorced when Edie Brickell, the singer-songwriter from Dallas, Texas, appeared with her band, the New Bohemians, on Saturday Night Live in November, 1988. As Brickell performed her hit single What I Am, she spotted Simon, a friend of SNL producer Lorne Michaels, on the set, watching her closely as she sang. He, in turn, "made me forget how the song went when I looked at him," Brickell said later.

They married in 1992, have three children (singer-songwriter Harper Simon is Paul's son from his first marriage) and divide their time between Simon's hometown and their property in central Texas. Asked how a lifelong New Yorker gets by in the Lone Star State, Simon concedes that "the official politics are just despicable. But the actual people are very nice." And the setting is "truthfully idyllic. It's an old farm house by a creek" with a "little log cabin that I made into the studio." The property next door "had a wedding venue. We bought that and kept the big hall, which is outfitted as a rehearsal place where Edie works with different bands." Simon has "enough to be busy and creative. And I'm not hanging out with the Attorney General or the Governor, for sure."

Brickell sang background vocals on Simon's 2011 album, *So Beautiful Or So What*, and is credited with "finger snaps" on 2018's *In The Blue Light*, progressive jazz revisions of songs from

The Apostle Paul

The spiritual songcraft of Simon. In the pew/shul: Andrew Male.

Blessed

(from Sounds Of Silence, 1966)

Overlooking Orlando di Lasso's Benedictus on 1964's *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* (a Garfunkel idea), this may be Paul Simon's first overt foray into religion: a reworking of The Sermon On The Mount in which our narrator wanders the vast Soho night, wondering why "meth drinkers… [and] illusion dwellers" are blessed yet he has been forsaken.

Mrs Robinson

(from Bookends, 1968)

Originally a tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt, reworked for 1967 film The Graduate, Simon's foot-tapping lament for the passing of a more innocent time is a song made cryptic by its revisions. Yet within its mystery is also its spirituality, the promise that those who still pray in these beleaguered times will be saved.

Bridge Over Troubled Water

(from Bridge Over Troubled Water, 1970)

Inspired by J.S. Bach's St Matthew Passion and repurposing a lyric from a Swan Silvertones song, Simon wrote this hymn to friendship in which the act of devotion takes on a spiritual element, the friend adopting the consoling words Jesus said to Mary of Bethany as she grieved the death of Lazarus.

Peace Like A River

(from Paul Simon, 1972)

A hushed, nighttime song in which Simon awakes from a nightmare, imagining a city curfew, people beaten "with wires… chains," but then feels a sense of harmony, possibly located in the song's opening line, taken from Isaiah 66:12: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river."

Silent Eyes

(from Still Crazy After All These Years, 1975)

Part gospel song, part mournful hymn in which Simon wrestles with his Jewish faith, metaphorically caught between America and Israel. Called by a weeping Jerusalem, he watches in silence as the city burns and ponders a future point when he will have to "stand before the eyes of God/And speak what was done."

Hearts And Bones

(from Hearts And Bones, 1983)

Ostensibly about the end of his marriage to Carrie Fisher, the mellifluous title track from Simon's troubled 1983 LP impudently presents the duo as, "One and one half wandering Jews… travelling together in the Blood of Christ Mountains," their ailing romantic union assuming the quality of Jewish legend, their promised reconciliation as elusive as the Second Coming.

The Cool, Cool River

(from The Rhythm Of The Saints, 1990)

A hypnotic, heartbreaking portrait of beleaguered Americans subsumed by work and rage, sending their battered dreams to heaven and their "memory of God". The song itself is also a kind of buffeted prayer, one for a future where "we shall suffer no more," yet diminished in the knowledge that "sometimes even music cannot substitute for tears."

How Can You Live In The Northeast?

(from Surprise, 2006)

Watching fireworks on Independence Day, Simon begins to question existence, ponders fate, empathy and faith, asking how much of our beliefs are predetermined by generations before us. Set against jagged rhythms, his soft questioning vocals take on the quality of agitation, the final verse conceding this is all being written from a position of privilege.

Questions For The Angels

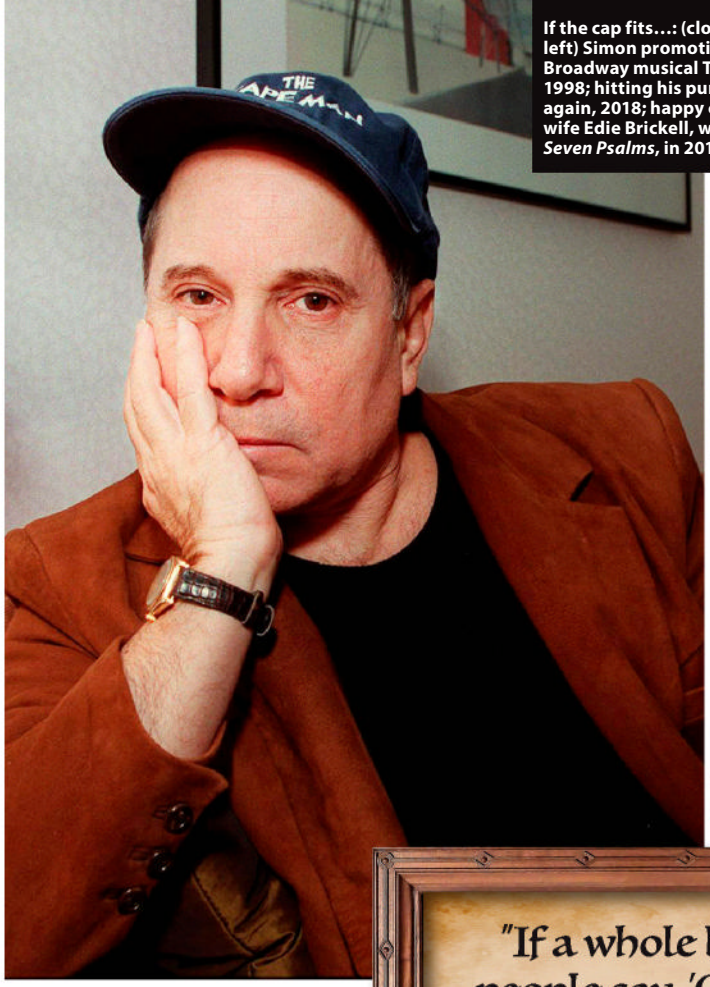
(from So Beautiful Or So What, 2011)

"For somebody who's not religious," said Simon of his twelfth solo LP, "God comes up a lot." Twelve years before *Seven Psalms*, the 70-year-old singer-songwriter was pondering the wonders and illogicalities of faith, as on this possible update of 1966's Blessed in which a young pilgrim walks amongst New York's homeless, contemplating humanity's worth.

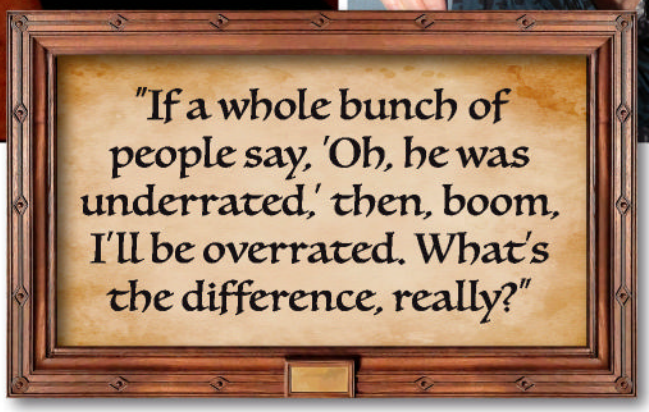
Proof Of Love

(From Stranger To Stranger, 2016)

Inspired by a visit Simon made to Brazilian healer João Teixeira de Faria hoping he might be cured of his violent nightmares, this is a complex song of pilgrimage and prayer which finds the singer asking the Lord for proof of love, only to find that the reply comes from inside himself: "Don't be afraid… Love on Earth is everywhere."



If the cap fits…: (clockwise from left) Simon promoting "giant flop" Broadway musical The Capeman, 1998; hitting his purple patch again, 2018; happy couple: with wife Edie Brickell, who sings on *Seven Psalms*, in 2016.



his catalogue. But she is a featured, singing partner for the first time on *Seven Psalms*, bringing a Texas-country warmth to The Sacred Harp and an angelic glow to the finale, Wait.

"We haven't done much singing on record," Simon admits. "Edie used to write these songs when she would take the kids to the park. We recorded three or four of them, and they were good. We intended to put them out, but the kids said, 'No, those are our songs.'"

But, he adds, "We have a good blend, and we'll do more singing together." And Simon points out, just as we get to the end of our conversation, that he has been writing new songs. As he puts it, "I'm getting interested again."

Why was Edie right for the songs on *Seven Psalms*?

She would be right for anything. I asked her to sing on The Sacred Harp because it's a Texas song. The couple driving the pick-up truck is in Texas, and that's us, you know? Aside from the fact that she always sings completely in tune, much to my envy, she is perfect for that character. She is also perfect for that character in Wait, like an angel singing about heaven.

In The Sacred Harp, you describe one of the young hitchhikers in the song this way: "Her voice a blend/Of regional perfumes." It's a compact reference that captures so much about a woman's sensuality and backstory. How long does it take you to shape a line like that and know where to put it in the song?

It was one of those lines that comes to you. I didn't work at it. I thought of it as a sweet kind of Southern accent, which is what Edie has. I wouldn't have used that line if I was describing a male character. I didn't think about how much it says about a woman. That's just one of those examples of how I don't know where it comes from, but I know it fits right here.

You have described your creative process as "looking for the edge of what you can hear… That's the thing I want." How close have you come with *Seven Psalms*?

I don't know. The critical reaction makes it feel like what I heard was felt by others. That's good. It could have easily been the opposite. I felt the same way when I made *Graceland*: I really like this. If it's a hit, I won't be surprised. But if it's not a hit, I won't be surprised. I could say the same thing about [Simon's 1998 Broadway musical] The Capeman. I thought, That's a really great sound, Latin music and doo-wop. I *really* like it. But it wasn't a hit. In fact, it was a giant flop.

It just means everyone loves *Graceland* and not too many people loved The Capeman. Both were good ideas to me. One of them I managed to bring to fruition in such a way that people embraced it. The other one, I didn't. *Seven Psalms* is an idea that I heard and tried to capture. If I hadn't, it's still very interesting to me. I did it *because* it was interesting.

What interests you now?

I have three songs in motion. One of them is finished. It feels like a half-step beyond what *Seven Psalms* is, evolving into something else. And that's literally a lifesaver because I haven't figured out how to perform with the hearing loss. I've tried to rehearse with the guys in my [touring] band, to see if I could manage it. I can't so far.

This is at least an outlet for thinking musically. *Seven Psalms*, because I had so much time to be solitary with it – I learned a lot about my musical thinking, how I might implement those thoughts with the instruments I have at hand. In fact, I just bought somebody's big collection of percussion instruments, mostly because I wanted to work with certain bells. But I'll find out whatever else is there. It's more subtle colours in the palette.

In Wait, you sing "Wait, I'm not ready/I'm packing my gear" – like someone far from done with music.

That idea of, "He's examining his mortality" – that's actually not true. There are elements in these songs that are autobiographical. That character in Wait could be me. It's not far from me. But am I actually thinking that on a daily basis? No, I'm not. Has it occurred to me? Yeah! That's how I was able to write it down (*laughs*). But no, I don't think this is my final piece.

What seems to be still going on is that cycle of every three years or so. I'm beginning to write songs again. I don't say, "OK, it's time to write. I'm going to go to my desk, sit down and start from this hour to that hour." Once it's going on, I'm writing all day – while I'm walking around or sitting down with a guitar.

I wasn't aware of it when I was 12 or 13 and wrote my first song. I don't think I became aware of it until I was in my forties. It's a flow. It carries me along. It's always been that way in my life.

Getty (2), Jake Edwards (Courtesy Paul Simon Music)

the hunger

desperate to be different yet insatiable for success, 30 years ago suede smashed records with their debut album. sexy, febrile, romantic, mysterious, it's both a timeless wonder and a throwback to a time before 'britpop' was a word. "it felt like we were the only band in town," they tell victoria segal.

photograph by kevin cummins

BY FEBRUARY 1993, SUEDE HAD BECOME accustomed to a certain standard of mayhem. After three years slogging around London's grottiest – and often emptiest – venues, they were gradually drawing an increasingly adoring word-of-mouth audience when Melody Maker turbo-charged the process by putting them on the cover of the April 25, 1992 issue as "The Best New Band In Britain". It was two weeks before the release of debut single, The Drowners. Subsequent live shows quickly became the stuff of flesh-pressing, shirt-ripping communion. "They were absolutely wild," recalls bassist Mat Osman fondly. "Quite feral. Genuinely Dionysian."

Evidently, however, the audience at the 13th Brit Awards, being held at London's Alexandra Palace on February 16, 1993, have yet to receive the memo. Footage shows host Richard O'Brien – creator of The Rocky Horror Show and therefore *au fait* with subversive thrills – trying to excite the seated crowd ("Please welcome the already legendary Suede!") but a wax-museum stillness settles over attendees as Suede crash into imminent third single Animal Nitrate.

A song that keeps a tight leash on pop's favourite taboos – sex, violence, class and drugs – its transgressions are effectively embodied by singer Brett Anderson and his tight black lace blouse. Every time he smacks the microphone down on his buttocks, there's an amplified thwack, like he's wearing a wire on an X-rated undercover mission. Meanwhile, contradicting his "retiring" reputation, guitarist Bernard Butler lunges and rocks at one side of the stage, mirrored by Osman on the other, while drummer Simon Gilbert hammers out the 1977 attitude.

In six weeks' time, there will be a glorious interregnum between grunge and Oasis when Suede's self-titled debut album becomes the fastest-selling debut in British history. Brits viewers wondering why this strange band were allowed near Annie Lennox and Rod Stewart might suddenly understand. For now, though, the band hurl down their instruments and sweep off-stage to applause on the rude side of 'polite'. It's not the first time Suede find themselves at odds with the mainstream. It won't be the last.

"WE WERE QUITE CONFRONTATIONAL," SAYS Brett Anderson, looking back 30 years from his house in the Somerset countryside. "As soon as we were able to polarise opinion, it fired me to be more provocative. I was so proud of what we were doing and the world that we were presenting. I guess there was a hubris there that I used to create a confrontation – ➢

Kevin Cummins/Getty

Blouse explosion: Suede's Brett Anderson (left) and Bernard Butler, March 1993.

The insatiable ones: (clockwise, from above left) Suede give it some panache (from left) Brett Anderson, Mat Osman, Simon Gilbert, Bernard Butler; on-stage at Camden Underworld, June 8, 1992, shortly after the release of debut single The Drowners; (insets, from top) The Drowners 45; "The Best New Band In Britain" according to Melody Maker, April 25, 1992; the "rackety glam" Metal Mickey 45; when Brett met Bowie, Camden Town, March 1993; what the Butler saw: Bernard on-stage at London's LA2, 1993.

Pennie Smith, Kevin Cummins, John Cheves

≺ like, 'Look at this. Look at what we're doing. What are *you* doing?' There's a kind of needling."

Suede's debut album still demands that reaction, its 11 tracks challenging the listener to enter its distinctive world, drawing them over its threshold with insinuations and leading questions: "Have you ever tried it that way? Do you believe in love there? What does it take to turn you on?" They often feel like furtive, frenzied conversations you'd hear by pressing a glass against a wall, touching on suicide or rough sex, sexual confusion, animals, drugs. Sleeping Pills, inspired by women Anderson met while volunteering at a Highgate community centre, topples into delirium; She's Not Dead laces the true story of Anderson's late aunt with bleak detail ("She's fucking with a slip of a man/While the engine ran"). It's rich in outsider psychology: "I was cut from the wreckage one day," sings Anderson on Pantomime Horse, "this is what I get for being that way".

"I was on the dole, I was living in rented accommodation and wearing second-hand clothes and I tried to write about that in a sort of quietly noble way," says Anderson. "It's saying, Well, this is my world, this is the world I'm used to – but I'm going to see some poetry in that."

Formed in 1989, Suede emerged into a UK indie music climate that Anderson saw as "sexless and unambitious and predictable. The panache had disappeared with The Stone Roses then there was a kind of a grey period where there were lots of these bands wearing T-shirts who looked like they'd just left the student union."

"The people we liked – the Kate Bushes and the John Lydons and the Johnny Marrs – had the kind of passion and drama and almost theatrical element that I think was missing," adds Mat Osman. "There was the shoegazing thing, lots of very '60s stuff and some droney stuff going on. It was all very backwards-looking."

It was also when grunge giants walked the earth. "The most powerful thing about the seed we planted was the rejection of American cultural imperialism," says Anderson. "You don't have to pretend to be from Washington and wear baseball caps to write interesting songs. It wasn't pro-British, it was just pro-reality. Our reality happened to be Britain."

While *Suede* is the record that launched Britpop by mistake, these songs exist in their own sealed universe, one very much disconnected from what would follow. "It felt like we were the only band in town – and we kind of were really," Anderson says with a smile. "Suede have always been their own little world. We were never sitting in [Camden 'scene' pub] The Good Mixer with all these other bands."

"You'd bump into other bands all over the place," recalls Jane Savidge, press officer with PR firm Savage And Best, who orchestrated the 18 magazine covers Suede enjoyed before even releasing their album. "You never used to see Brett in the supermarket."

("I don't remember eating much in those days," admits Anderson wryly. "I used to exist on salad pittas from kebab shops.")

They kept other kinds of distance, too. "The Englishness that Suede presented was a sort of broken world of failure, and for me that was more interesting than what came after, which was sort of slightly dull and laddish and jingoistic," says Anderson. "We all know what happened."

GROWING UP ON THE OUTskirts of the outskirts of Sussex dormitory town Haywards Heath, Brett Anderson was "constantly gazing at pictures of The Kinks recording, or Paul McCartney in Abbey Road." The studio was "a magical place of possibility" – and in the winter of 1992, he could reach it on the 31 bus from his Notting Hill base to the Kilburn High Road. After a stint at Islington's Angel Recording Studios, Suede were recording their first album at Master Rock Studios with producer Ed Buller, former Psychedelic Furs keyboardist who also worked on The Drowners and its rackety glam follow-up Metal Mickey. The band were eager to open their songs to a world of sound – piano, maybe some Moog – but beyond these opportunities for musical experimentation, the studio offered other wonders.

"We went to the loo and there was nice soap in one of those Carex dispensers, and it was, Well, this is really luxurious," recalls Anderson with the grin of a man fondly despairing of his younger self. "We didn't have any soap in my flat because it was basically a glorified squat. That was a real novelty."

"We were young and poor in London," explains Osman. "There were lots of parties, there were lots of drugs. There was lots of sex. But none of it was very glamorous because we couldn't afford to go anywhere. The history of the band and the people in the band up until [1996's third album] *Coming Up* – it takes place in people's bedrooms."

Schoolfriends from Haywards Heath, Osman and Anderson came to London for university. Anderson fell in love with architecture student and future Elastica frontwoman Justine Frischmann: the couple formed a band with Osman, although it eventually became apparent that they needed a lead guitarist. They placed an advert in NME – "Smiths, Commotions, Bowie, PSB, no musos, please. Some things are more important than ability."

First came the inevitable muso; then 19-year-old Bernard Butler. What did they see in him? "Competence," deadpans Anderson. "We were three student dreamers sitting there getting stoned and writing songs that sounded like The Lilac Time. Bernard came along and he could really play. He had sort of a hustler's mentality: he created a momentum, like a friendly challenge – 'I've come up with this, what you gonna do to it?'"

After a surreal interlude with Mike Joyce of The Smiths, they recruited Sex Pistols fanatic Simon Gilbert as drummer; the line-up ironically coalesced when Frischmann and Anderson broke up (she started going out with Blur's Damon Albarn, completing the Britpop soap opera's great love triangle). For all the personal differences, there were musical differences too. While Anderson thought the luscious oblivion of Sleeping Pills was a breakthrough, Frischmann was wary of the more theatrical songs.

"I always wanted the band to grasp that, to not just be a noisy indie rock band," says Anderson. "Bands like The Smiths, for every What Difference Does It Make? they had an I Know It's Over. I wanted to have that duality."

Frischmann's departure "freed me and Bernard to write those more ambitious songs and just let go. Suddenly, there was a clarity. Bernard had to play rhythm and lead at the same time, which meant that it became a bit simpler and more primal. And that was a good thing."

Anderson's lyric-writing was also fundamentally shifting. He describes early Momus-inspired songs as "prissy and wordy and nice. As soon as I started writing about the simple, powerful emotions like grief and lust and violence, the music started reflecting that."

Osman agrees. "So much of rock songwriting is built on other metaphors: higher, fire, desire. And then you have someone singing 'I was born as a pantomime horse' and it's like, OK, fine, this is *him* now. That's come from nowhere apart from someone examining their own life, and the beauty of it and the mystery of it."

More mystery came from Anderson's sexuality, his lyrics flitting through pronouns ahead of the genderfluid curve. "We kiss in his room/To a popular tune" from The Drowners was the one for scrawling on school books, but Moving ("So we are a boy/We are a girl") or Drowners B-side My Insatiable One emphasised Suede's outlier status.

"The overt sexuality – I don't really know how to talk about it now because it feels like an old version of me that I don't really feel much affinity with," says Anderson. "I'm not rejecting it and disowning it at all, but it's hard for me to know where my head was at then. It was part of wanting to go against the grain, wanting to do something that no one else was doing. I'm proud that in a decade that was very misogynistic and laddish, we were standing up against this tide."

"suede wasn't pro-british, it was just pro-reality. our reality happened to be britain."
brett anderson

THEIR FORMATIVE YEARS IN THE INDIE TRENCHES allowed Suede to evolve along their own developmental pathway. "I've always been intrigued by bands where you can tell that they can only sound like themselves," says Anderson. "You can't imagine The Velvet Underground breaking out into some sort of funk jam."

Ineptitude, he says, initially stopped them copying the baggy ➢

Maybe in the next life: (clockwise from top left) Ed Buller, ex-Psychedelic Fur and producer of the first three Suede albums (as well as the sixth, seventh and ninth), behind the desk in Angel Studios, 1992; Brett Anderson with (left) Nude Records' Saul Galpern; Anderson at the Brit Awards, February 17, 1993; the post-Bernard Butler line-up, 1996 (from left) Simon Gilbert, Richard Oakes, Anderson, Mat Osman, Neil Codling; the 1993 debut and 1994 follow-up *Dog Man Star*; Gilbert at Angel Studios, 1992, during sessions for *Suede*; Butler (left) and Osman at Angel.

John Cheves (3), Shutterstock, Getty, Dean Chalkley, Phillip Williams

< or shoegazing scenes too much. "We jumped up on these stages at places like the Camden Falcon and the Bull And Gate and A&R men would happen upon us and see that we were absolute rubbish, which we were, and so they kind of left us alone."

In this isolation, they learned to write Suede songs, Butler's "competence" flowering into something more spectacular: an unearthly alliance of Johnny Marr and Mick Ronson "at once so violent and tender", as Anderson wrote in his 2018 memoir, Coal Black Mornings. "Bernard was like an old-fashioned virtuoso guitar player," says Ed Buller. "A pure rock god, out of the Hendrix mould."

Former Island Records employee Saul Galpern, who was setting up his own label, Nude, went to see them at The Venue in New Cross on a bill with Adorable and Fabulous in January 1992. The other A&R people "had already seen Suede when Justine was in the band." They stayed in the bar. They didn't realise things had changed.

"I thought, That's Bryan Ferry on-stage," says Galpern. "That's like The Smiths and Roxy Music to me. And they were wearing cords and these… shirts, which I found hilarious. They just looked out of fashion, which made me think they were different. I was the only person who called them on the Monday morning at 9am."

Galpern went to see Suede in Butler's Hackney flat, finding them "sitting on the bed all huddled up laughing and joking. It was a very unserious conversation."

Things were about to become significantly more serious, however. They signed a singles deal with Nude, teaming up with Ed Buller and preparing to release The Drowners in May. Then came the Melody Maker cover. "Morrissey came to a gig at The Falcon," says Galpern. "American labels started flying in. It just went crazy. And I only had them signed for a couple of singles so I was a bit nervy." (They would reward Galpern's early belief by sticking with Nude.)

Meanwhile, journalists were harping on the "pressure" to deliver a perfect debut. "We deliberately responded by saying, 'Oh we don't feel the pressure, we don't know what you're talking about,'" recalls Anderson, "almost a kind of teenage response. But I think we did. There was a weight of expectation on us that we couldn't have failed to have felt."

YET SUEDE WERE ALSO BLISSFULLY CONFIDENT IN their material ("The thing about playing live, especially to not many people – is you learn what works," says Osman). And writing for the album unearthed more quality. Animal Nitrate was inspired by Anderson mishearing something whispered in his

ear at Highbury gig venue The Garage; So Young was a doomed anthem embellished by Buller's Mike Garson-influenced piano; the Morrissey-does-Crash Breakdown was all retrosexual jealousy and warmish leatherette.

"Tracks like Breakdown are much trippier than things like Animal Lover that we'd played a million times," says Osman, noting the psych undercurrent that ran beneath *Suede*'s more overt glam and punk moves. Buller recalls the band playing covers for hours just for fun, including Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun and Itchycoo Park. "If we decided to put the tapes away and have a party one night, they'd sit back and play Pink Floyd tracks," he says, amused. "There was a perfectly good videogame console in reception and they weren't interested."

Buller, says Osman, "had a far wider musical knowledge than us. He liked lots of stuff we hated: Henry Cow, Tangerine Dream. But he also knew a ton of electronic records that we just didn't know. He had a massive Moog about the size of a house and he would bring in bits of that. And there's lots of '*whoosh*' noises. We've done a Dolby surround mix with Steven Wilson from Porcupine Tree and it's really interesting to suddenly hear those Moog things that were hidden away."

"I was the biggest Marc Bolan fan on the planet," says Buller. "I have a great affection for a particular type of guitar sound which is this kind of sticky fuzzy guitar that's not heavy metal. And Bernard loved all that too." The one rule, says the producer, was nothing from the '80s was to creep in. "So the drums sound roomy and organic. Brett was only listening to *Hunky Dory* at that time, but Bernard was interested in other music – Neil Young, Led Zeppelin, Bert Jansch. The Smiths were the band they all loved, but we didn't want the Smiths guitar sound."

Suede closed with a taste of the torch songs that would play a part in their future. Featuring an exposed Anderson accompanied by Butler on piano, The Next Life is a cold dawn on which to end such a fevered collection (only years later did Anderson realise he'd written it about his mother, Sandra, who died in 1989). It also stands as a reminder of the delicate balance that existed between singer and guitarist.

"In every writing partnership you need a romantic and a technician," Anderson says. "It's not like I was the romantic and Bernard was the technician – that's diminishing him and it's diminishing me – but you need both of those elements and both of those people need to have those elements in them. I learned an incredible amount from Bernard and I probably wouldn't be sitting here talking to you now if I hadn't met him. I certainly wouldn't be sitting here telling you about this record."

SUEDE WAS RELEASED ON MARCH 29, 1993, AND IF, as had also been the case with the first Smiths album, there was a slight sense of anticlimax in some reviews, it hardly mattered. First week sales were unprecedented for a debut album in the UK. The mood in the camp should have been euphoric, but as Saul Galpern notes, "as things were exploding, they were imploding."

While Anderson, says Buller, "was so good at being a pop star," Butler was not enjoying the band's new profile, swerving the press, wishing he could just focus on making music. A co-headline tour with The Cranberries in the US, meanwhile, was painfully complicated by the death of Butler's father. When Ed Buller regrouped with the band to record a single, Stay Together, that autumn, the atmosphere was transformed. The tensions were a grim predictor of the cataclysmic meltdown during sessions for second album, 1994's *Dog Man Star*, when Butler exited the group amid furious acrimony.

In 1998, promoting his first solo album, the guitarist's rage was still bright: about Buller's production of Stay Together and *Dog Man Star*, the band's direction, his relationship with Anderson. "In the end I left because I didn't want to be associated with a bad record," he told NME. "I mean, song titles like We Are The Pigs – I can't believe I made a record called that." (Butler politely declined to be interviewed for this piece.)

In the shellshocked aftermath of *Dog Man Star*, recruitment of teenage Suede fan Richard Oakes on guitar and keyboard player Neil Codling saved the band, and 1996's defiant *Coming Up* was the sharp pop antithesis of *Dog Man Star*'s grand sprawl. From there, however, Anderson's drug use and the inhospitable environment of the later '90s aggravated a decline that ended in dissolution in 2003. Suede's first act was over.

The record that began their brilliant career is not so easily summed up. Born into a frenzy of expectation, eternally and unwillingly yoked to Britpop, 30 years on *Suede* stands alone, darkly idiosyncratic, a password-protected transmission from the margins.

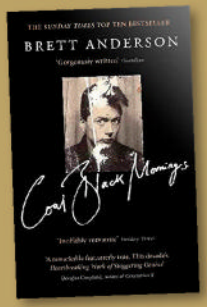
"The momentum was so huge," says Anderson. "It felt very much like we were making a record that really meant something. We didn't know what it meant, and the '90s hadn't been set in stone like it is now. But it still felt that we were part of some movement, and that movement contained one band. And that was us."

Suede: 30th Anniversary Edition, remastered on CD and vinyl, is available now on Demon Records.

A work of autofiction: Suede today (from left) Oakes, Codling, Osman, Anderson, Gilbert.

"we tapped into the primal core of the band"

suede in 2023: new songs, classic moves, and shrieking. bring 'em on, says victoria segal.



THE FIRST THING Brett Anderson mentions as he sits down to discuss Suede's debut is that he's currently writing songs for a new Suede album.

"Doing retro stuff is fine if you're doing current stuff," he says with a smile, "and you really can learn a lot about yourself now when you look at yourself in the past."

At the moment, writing involves taking headphones and computer to a spare room in his house "where no one can really hear me because what I need to do is just shriek, looking for some note. It's incredibly unmusical."

If last year's ninth album, *Autofiction*, was anything to go by, the shrieking is working out. Anderson says that album "landed so well because we tapped into the primal core of the band we are."

The new work-in-progress would be Suede's fifth album since Anderson, Mat Osman, Simon Gilbert, Richard Oakes and Neil Codling reunited in 2013, unhappy with 2002's *A New Morning* as their last testament. Highly charged comeback *Bloodsports* would have been vindication enough, but re-formation escalated into full-pelt resurgence. Doused in post-punk accelerant, *Autofiction* propelled them to Number 2 in the UK charts.

Cheeringly for Suede, the audience isn't exclusively original fans, either. "The only real problem with it, of course, is a lot of people fall in love with the previous incarnation of the band – the young, pretty version of you in videos," Osman laughs. "Then they come along to the shows and go: 'Oh, Jeez.'"

Suede's renewed energy overspills the stage. Anderson has written two illuminating memoirs, 2018's Coal Black Mornings and 2019's Afternoons With The Blinds Drawn, while Osman has just published his second novel The Ghost Theatre, a fantastical wander through Elizabethan London's drama scene. Whatever drove them 30 years ago isn't letting up.

"When we were doing *Autofiction*, one of the things we said was it should sound like it used to sound in a rehearsal room, when it was the four of us," says Osman. "That kind of scruffy racket is still so appealing to us."

"I learned a lot about the band from *Autofiction*," says Anderson. "It sounds obvious but sometimes you've got to be who you are, and just do that really well."

BIG STAR

"Shitting a brick" in the White House, playing ping-pong with Alice Cooper, reaping karma with Frank Zappa: it's been a wild ride for MARK VOLMAN, rich voice of The Turtles and the larger half of Flo & Eddie. Living proof of the power of letting it all hang out? "Many artists wish they could relax and bare their chests," he tells MARTIN ASTON.

Portrait by GIJSBERT HANEKROOT.

DICK NIXON'S WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON DC, May 10, 1969. Full-fat freaks disguised as chummy chart pop purveyors, The Turtles are on enemy territory and everyone knows it. A suspicious tick-tick-ticking sound in one of their flight cases has alerted the Security Service, and guns are trained on the longhaired band before the source can be ascertained – an electric metronome. In the words of Turtles singer Howard Kaylan: "the term 'shitting a brick' comes to mind…"

Later, maybe to settle his nerves, or perhaps as a gesture of freak-flag defiance, Kaylan snorts cocaine off a desk in Abraham Lincoln's library. The band's other featured singer, Mark Volman, is more circumspect; well, as circumspect as a man who is still as drunk and high as could be.

"Beer and champagne and pot played a part," Volman tells MOJO today. "But I never felt confident during the coke years, and there was a lot going on that day and night."

The Turtles' presence – they're here to play Nixon's daughter Tricia's masked ball – encapsulates their current dilemma. When the band's fourth single, the high-octane harmony pop of Happy Together, knocked The Beatles' Penny Lane off the top of the US charts in early 1967, delight at their success was tempered by subsequent expectations and pigeonholing. Whilst The Turtles wanted to be The Beatles, straddling pop singles and rock albums, their record label, White Whale, demanded assembly-line hits. But since early '69, the hits have dried up. And now this dubious accolade: Tricia Nixon's Favourite Band.

"It all caught up with us," Volman sighs. "The White House gig would prolong our career for another month but the fun had gone. White Whale were tiny compared to Capitol and Columbia; how do you compete with The Beatles and The Byrds? We weren't great songwriters either. And we'd gone through seven managers in five years. It was madness."

By late 1970, lawsuits had started to fly. Not only did White Whale claim it owned the name 'The Turtles', but those of 'Howard Kaylan' ➢

Getty

Get your freak on: Mark Volman (left) and Howard Kaylan, AKA Flo & Eddie, ready to blow up, Amsterdam, 1975.

Tricky business: (right) Mark Volman keeps his eye on Tricia Nixon, daughter of US President Richard Nixon, before The Turtles entertain a White House ball, May 10, 1969 (from right) John Seiter, Volman, Tricia Nixon, Howard Kaylan, Al Nichol, Jim Pons; (below) The Turtles meet an inflatable namesake, 1967 (clockwise from bottom) Chuck Portz, Nichol, Don Murray, Kaylan, Volman, Jim Tucker.

Alamy, Courtesy Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

◀ and 'Mark Volman' too. What were they to do?

It was then that the least imaginable figure came to their rescue: none other than countercultural warlord Frank Zappa offered the duo the chance to join The Mothers Of Invention. Kaylan and Volman were about to ascend to another level of madness…

IN 2023, THE 76-YEAR-OLD VOLMAN CAN LOOK BACK at seven decades of creativity and high-jinks and chuckle at the absurdity of it all, not to mention the extraordinary variety of his collaborations, from Lennon and Ringo to Bowie and Bolan, Springsteen, Steely Dan, Blondie and Lou Reed, The Psychedelic Furs and Duran Duran.

It's all laid out in his book Happy Forever: My Musical Adventures With The Turtles, Frank Zappa, T. Rex, Flo & Eddie, And More. It's not a standard music memoir – Volman is only one of over a hundred interviewees, alongside former bandmates, fellow artists, managers, family members and Jesuit priests – but rather a broader portrait of Golden Age pop and rock culture, with chapter headings including 'The Scene', 'The Business' and 'Drugs'.

"The book's candid, but not unruly," Volman informs MOJO, sat in his home in Nashville. "It's just wide open about the world we all came into. And it's the truth."

Volman's own truth is that he remains one of the rock-and-pop fraternity's oddest brothers, the antithesis of 'cool', a throwback to vaudeville. Not a songwriter or even a musician, his gift is his voice: with Kaylan, their rich, high-flying blend garnered them renown as the greatest backing singers in the business. Yet it's possible that many MOJO readers won't even recognise Volman, who still sports big, curly hair, with matching girth and thick-rimmed spectacles. Say hello to the Zelig of rock'n'roll.

"That's exactly what the book is meant to say. 'Who is this guy?'"

Volman's story begins at Westchester High, just north of Los Angeles International Airport (future Manson Family murderer Squeaky Fromme was a classmate) when the self-confessed "class clown" asked if he could join the local surf band The Nightriders, fronted by Kaylan. What can you contribute, they wondered? "Nothing," Volman replied. He cracks up at the memory of his chutzpah. "Eventually, Howard got me in to sing hit songs of the day. But I wasn't even thinking about being in the music industry. It was more, Get out of high school and have a good time."

The Nightriders became The Crossfires, then – sensing the times were a-changing – The Turtles for their debut single, a Byrds-inspired cover of Dylan's It Ain't Me Babe, which immediately broke the US Top 10 in 1965. Good times were had. "We were living A Hard Day's Night," he says: mainstream TV slots, screaming fans, a stage debut alongside Herman's Hermits and The Lovin' Spoonful at the Rose Bowl, Pasadena in front of a crowd of 78,000, the start of the Dick Clark Caravan Of Stars tour on which they were introduced to marijuana by the MOR crooner Mel Carter.

"What an amazing thing to happen to kids – I was barely 18," says Volman. "We'd signed a contract without caring what it said, just to have the chance."

By the end of 1967, The Turtles had another US Top 3 single, She'd Rather Be With Me, and successive Top 20 hits. Feeling validated and ambitious, they conceived a concept album, *The Turtles Present The Battle Of The Bands*, a satirical masterpiece in which the band adopted the guise of 11 different bands with varying styles. "It was the first time an entire album project was the focus," says Volman. "It's a part of our history that's overlooked."

But whilst *Battle*… cuts Elenore and Byrds cover You Showed Me were both US Top 10 singles in '68, the album bombed, and the reversal of Turtle fortunes in 1969 was marked. After the White House foray, the band agreed to play another private party, for the daughter of a high-ranking US Steel executive. Kaylan prepared by taking LSD, telling the crowd what was on his mind ("You capitalist pigs! What's happening to America?"), before walking off, and

Reinvent yourselves: Volman and Kaylan, AKA The Phlorescent Leech & Eddie, on-stage with Frank Zappa (right) and The Mothers, Rotterdam, November 27, 1971.

> "Zappa saw the comedy in what we did. It was our job to make him laugh, which wasn't easy."
> **MARK VOLMAN**

out of the band. Humbled, he rejoined for what became their final album, *Turtle Soup* – produced by their hero, Ray Davies of The Kinks. One last official single was released; the exquisite ballad Lady-O, penned by the band's new discovery, Judee Sill.

"Such a sad story," says Volman. "She was so talented, but we were unable to solve her problems with heroin – something that none of the Turtles were into."

POST-TURTLES, KAYLAN AND VOLMAN'S NEW BOSS Frank Zappa was vocally anti-drugs – but he'd always appreciated the pair's irreverence, the way they'd send up pop music instead of conforming to type. "Frank saw the comedy in what we did, and he brought it further out when we joined The Mothers," says Volman. "It was also our job to make him laugh, which wasn't easy."

Adopting the nicknames of two former Turtles' roadies – Volman became The Phlorescent Leech (later shortened to Flo) and Kaylan became Eddie – the duo played the part of Zappa's freewheeling, improvising mouthpiece. Life with the notorious autocrat was challenging, but the Kaylan-Volman partnership held strong. "Frank gave us a lot of space, and he saw we were just as capable stoned as we were straight," says Volman. "He'd make fun of us: 'Oh, you're so professional.'" In fact, Volman reveals, "Frank took pot with us many times. I think it was his chance to relax."

Flo & Eddie's fun and games drew others into The Mothers' orbit. In spring 1971, Zappa was introduced to John Lennon and Yoko Ono and invited them to join him on-stage at New York's Fillmore East. Rehearsing at the couple's Dakota apartment, Lennon – having first made the *faux pas* of asking Zappa if he was holding – got stoned with Kaylan and Volman before a jam yielded "this idiot riff that would later turn into this song called Scumbag."

That night, during Scumbag's extended jazz-rock-boogie, "Howard had the idea to pull a burlap sack over Yoko's head, because he couldn't stand her screaming. But Yoko climbed right in. It's still one of the funniest things I've ever been part of. We learnt so much about how to be obnoxious."

But one of Volman's fondest memories is another show at Fillmore East in November that year, where Joni Mitchell joined in. "She recited a poem called Penelope Wants To Fuck The Sea." Volman cracks up again. "Frank brought that out in you! He made it OK to be weird."

After two years in The Mothers, the bubble began to deflate. "Howard and I had started to panic," says Volman. "There was a lot of negativity both in Frank's music and on-stage."

Matters came to a head after a flare shot into the ceiling by a fan burned down the Montreux Casino, taking with it the Mothers' equipment. Zappa wanted to cut his losses and head straight home but the band – paid per show – convinced him to honour the remaining UK dates. At London's Rainbow Theatre on December 10, 1971, an audience member shoved Zappa off the stage and into the orchestra pit, putting him in traction and out of action for a year. "Was Frank's accident karma? There it is!" Volman's laugh is more nervous this time. "It made me look at my own life, and wanting to change," Volman sighs. "To become a better person."

THE RAINBOW DEBACLE WAS THE END OF THAT Mothers line-up, but another opportunity arose, back in the world of pop. In September 1969, Tyrannosaurus Rex had supported The Turtles in Detroit, and while appearing with The Mothers at 1970's Bath Festival, Volman and Kaylan were invited to sing back-up on the renamed T. Rex's eponymous album.

The duo were subsequently to sing on almost all Marc Bolan's early hits: Hot Love, Get It On, Metal Guru, the albums *Electric Warrior* and *The Slider*. "They were integral to the T. Rex sound," noted producer Tony Visconti.

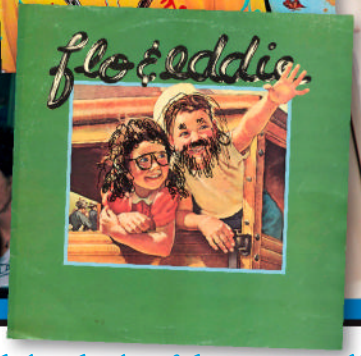
"Marc was a pompous son of a bitch, and I loved him for it," says Volman – forgivingly, it seems, because when Kaylan and Volman finally asked to be paid, Bolan cut them off and, with Visconti's help, impersonated their trademark sound instead.

In any case, T. Rex was a freelance gig, and Flo & Eddie needed full-time employment. Out of loyalty to Volman, Kaylan had turned down the chance to become Steely Dan's lead singer alongside Donald Fagen after the duo had sung on a handful of the band's early demos ("I don't think Steely Dan would have gotten a record deal, or the kind of record deal they did, without their vocals," Dan guitarist Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter says in Volman's book). Why were the duo so inseparable?

"Fear!" Volman shoots back. "We just felt very comfortable ➢

Getty

Rock'n'roll Zelig: (clockwise from left) Volman with Stephen Stills, 1975; Ringo Starr and Keith Moon join the Flo & Eddie Radio Show fun, April 14, 1974; Volman in 2011 teaching a music management class at Belmont University, Nashville; Kaylan and Volman get into relaxation mode with Lou Reed, 1975.



"Howard had the idea to pull a burlap sack over Yoko's head. We learnt so much about how to be obnoxious."

MARK VOLMAN

together, especially on-stage, and remember, we weren't the most handsome duo. We just both had a smart side."

A deal with Warner Bros led to 1972's *The Phlorescent Leech & Eddie*, an album that tapped all their resources: pop, glam, heavier rock and stoned humour. Says Volman, "We knew we could sing, we just never had the songwriting down, and we were jumping around trying to find our direction. But we were good at finding songs and working with great producers."

But jumping around, sometimes literally, could have a downside. At San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom in October 1972, supporting David Bowie and the Spiders on their maiden US tour, Volman fell off the stage. "I tripped over the cords of the monitor," he says. "After the show, Bowie said, 'You couldn't get enough interest from the crowd, you had to jump off!'"

Maintaining their links with the nascent glam scene, 1973's follow-up album *Flo & Eddie* was produced by Bob Ezrin, riding high with Alice Cooper, who subsequently requested the duo support the band on their *Billion Dollar Babies* tour. Rather than provide what Volman calls "the donkey show", as they did with Zappa, they were more like emotional support animals for Cooper. "Alice said he wouldn't do the tour if they couldn't bring us with them," Volman claims. "We travelled on their plane; I'd organise poker every day, and ping-pong tournaments. There was the occasional bud of marijuana but otherwise it was alcohol, which was going to kill Alice if he wasn't careful."

Volman's clubbability was again an asset when Stephen Stills asked them to be his tour support in 1975, and play the harmonic roles of Crosby and Nash in his headline set. Stills also requested Flo & Eddie ride on his tour bus as all the other members of his entourage had had their fill of their bandleader's cocaine-induced moodswings. "Stephen was an interesting guy, with a lot of issues," says Volman, cagily. "But Howard and I were good therapists. Those opportunities would ultimately make us stronger, though Warners couldn't figure out what the hell we were doing."

ANOTHER THING Warners might have questioned was Volman and Kaylan's radio show on LA's KROQ. Flo & Eddie By The Fireside was distinguished by its guest stars, including Ringo Starr, Harry Nilsson and Keith Moon, plus the pair's impromptu comedy routines. It was a version of the letting-it-all-hang-out aesthetic that embraced Flo & Eddie's ample physiques, celebrated rather than concealed on 1975's *Illegal, Immoral & Fattening* album cover.

"'Celebrate' is a beautiful word for it," says Volman. "It was easier to have fun, and for people to see the joy I had on-stage. Many artists wish they could relax and bare their chests."

The next request for their services came from the opposite end of the rock star girth spectrum. And it wasn't for therapy, or even singing, but scriptwriting. In the middle of his LA sojourn, David Bowie had conceived a film called The Traveller. "It was about this prince or duke," says Volman, "who travels across the Atlantic by boat, telling stories and lying about his identity. I think David was tapping our improvising side with Zappa. But in the end, David likes things more symmetrical and squared off, so it wasn't such a good match."

Meanwhile, the shine was coming off Volman's rock'n'roll jollies. In Happy Forever, Flo & Eddie's manager Skip Taylor admits dealing cocaine rather than have his rock star friends buy on the street. When robbers invaded Taylor's house looking for his stash, a gun went off "through a stack of albums," he relates. "And the top album was [Flo & Eddie's] *Moving Targets*. When I told Mark and Howard, they were terrified. They thought it was a message."

Soon after, on tour with The Doobie Brothers in Salt Lake City, Flo & Eddie's touring guitarist Phil Reed was found dead beneath his ninth floor hotel room window. Whether Reed was involved

Henry Diltz, Getty (2), Alamy

with drugs, or if he jumped, fell or was pushed, has never been resolved. Volman still feels guilty. "I'd talked to Phil the night before, about making some changes to the group. I guess you get the bad with the good. But Howard and I took a year off after that."

It was time for Volman to take another look at his own life.

"I never thought I exposed myself to anything that would rule my life," he says. "But I was a cocaine user and abuser for a time, and then we just stopped, in 1987. Howard and I made a commitment, to stay healthy long enough to have a career."

FLO & EDDIE'S CAREER CONTINUED down the 'no plan/have a good time' path. In 1981, a nightclub owner who shared the duo's love of reggae had funded what became their last album, *Rock Steady With Flo & Eddie*, recorded in Jamaica with producer Errol Brown of Hot Chocolate. "An awesome record!" Volman reckons, but one searching in vain for an audience. Instead, the duo raised their radio and TV profile, with voices and music for film (Down And Dirty Duck; The Adventures Of The American Rabbit) and children's TV (Strawberry Shortcake; The Care Bears show): "All that stuff to keep ourselves away from touring," noted Kaylan.

In 1983, they finally regained the rights to their own names and that of The Turtles, and the band's master tapes, beginning a reissue campaign and 40 years of lucrative Turtles reunions, which effectively kicked Flo & Eddie into touch. "We finally had something that paid," says Volman. "And the opportunity to finally say, This is us."

In 1989, Volman and Kaylan reasserted their rights in more controversial circumstances when they sued hip-hop trio De La Soul for sampling 11 seconds of The Turtles' You Showed Me without clearance. It was settled out of court. The irony of being the aggressive litigator isn't lost on Volman.

"It was an area of music we didn't understand," he says. "But it was like: here we are, struggling artists ourselves, but we become successful artists for someone else, and we didn't want the music used that way. We wanted to stay true to what we felt was ourselves. The lawsuit opened up the door for not just us but many others feeling the same way, including the writers of You Showed Me."

Hip-hop appears to have forgiven them as The Turtles have since been sampled 140 times. Backing-singer sessions also came thick and fast: Sammy Hagar, Bruce Springsteen, Psychedelic Furs, Darlene Love, Ramones, Duran Duran, and their fourth Alice Cooper album in 2011's *Welcome 2 My Nightmare*. At Gavin Friday's 50th birthday party concert in 2009, Kaylan and Volman sang with U2, Maria McKee, Anohni, Lou Reed and Laurie Anderson.

Volman's aim to better himself took him back to school in 1992, ending with a Masters degree in Fine Arts. He is currently Chair of Entertainment Industry Studies at Belmont University in Nashville whilst consulting on music business via the Ask Professor Flo section of The Turtles' website. "I teach students how to get a job, and every element: management, publishing, radio, touring… I even took students on Turtles tours, and gave them their own tour bus!"

Ill-health has been a recent issue, though the cancer of the throat and tongue diagnosed in 2015 is now in remission. "I'm healthy now," he vouches. "I didn't expect to be around when the book would be finished." It hurts that Kaylan's own problems means he has not joined Volman for Turtles shows since 2017. "Half of me is not there," he sighs. "But I gotta do what I do. I still love those songs, and that's the important part.

"When Gene Pitney died, I said I didn't want to die in a hotel room like him. But I'd take that now, because that's where I've been for the last 50 years. When I had cancer, I still toured. And I'm not done yet, because I'm discussing a podcast."

It's hard to think of any singer with more time-spanning gossip – and advice – to share. "Just thinking about it makes me feel tired!" Volman wheezes. "It's just a massive amount of history. It's a bit shocking too. But what a fun, wild ride."

Happy Forever by Mark Volman with John Cody is published by Jawbone.

ENDLESS HARMONY

Volman and Kaylan *in excelsis*, selected by MARTIN ASTON.

The Turtles
Elenore
(single, 1968)

Happy Together defined the band's whip-smart sunshine pop, but Elenore – the group's parodic response to their record label begging for another Happy Together – was even better. Sing along now: "You're my pride and joy, et cetera!"

T. Rex
Hot Love
(single, 1971)

Marc Bolan's first Number 1 single was an irresistible slinky boogie, crowned by a wordless Hey Jude-aping coda with Kaylan and Volman's creamy falsettos gilding an intoxicating formula that Bolan was loathe to change.

The Mothers Of Invention
Billy The Mountain
(from Just Another Band From LA, 1972)

The apotheosis of Flo & Eddie's stint in The Mothers, Zappa's snarky response to the popularity of rock operas made the best use of the duo's comedy chops and vocal aerobics. Sing along now: "Pools of old poison gas/And obsolete germ bombs!"

Steely Dan
Everyone's Gone To The Movies
(demo, 1971, on Citizen Steely Dan 1972-1980)

Everyone… was finally finessed on the Dan's fourth album *Katy Lied* (with female BVs) but the earlier demo was included in the band's career-spanning box set for a good reason: the arrangement swings more than the familiar version's, pushed on by Flo & Eddie's emphatic performance.

Flo & Eddie
You Showed Me/ Kung Fu Killer
(live at the Capitol Theatre, Passaic, NJ; on YouTube)

This sums up the duo's art and tomfoolery: a reverent version of The Turtles' last Top 10 hit segued into Carl Douglas's Kung Fu Fighting and the spoken section from The Doors' The End. A refreshing change from heavy-browed rock seriousness.

Flo & Eddie
Keep It Warm
(from Moving Targets, 1976)

Keep It Warm defies Volman's claim that he and Kaylan weren't good songwriters, and proved the duo had heart as well as humour, with a gorgeous Beach Boys-y elegy for American decadence. Sing along now: "Kill another whale with your power/Shoot a bunch a kids from a tower."

Stephen Stills
The Loner
(from Illegal Stills, 1976)

Illegal Stills is far from Stills' best solo record but it hits some heights, especially this cover of Neil Young's debut single (reputedly about Stills), with Flo & Eddie's effortless faux-Crosby/faux-Nash support.

Bruce Springsteen
Hungry Heart
(single, 1980)

Springsteen often gave away his catchiest songs, but he kept Hungry Heart, a classy pop conceit that needed classy radio-friendly backing. Who you gonna call? The result: the Boss's first Billboard Top 5 smash.

The Psychedelic Furs
Love My Way
(single, 1983)

Producer Todd Rundgren knew all about Kaylan and Volman's simultaneously silken and earthy touch, roping them in for the Furs' first bid for pop cred. The reward: a place in the US Top 50.

Gavin Friday
King Of Trash
(from Adam 'N' Eve, 1992)

When Friday's second solo album played the glam card, producer-sage Hal Willner knew that only T. Rex's secret weapon would suffice. Twenty years after they contributed to Bolan's success, the duo's voices brought the same ecstatic firepower.

Dude awakenings: Mott The Hoople in 1974 (from left) Morgan Fisher, Ian Hunter, Ariel Bender, Dale 'Buffin' Griffin, Pete Overend Watts; (right) "We picked up a lot from Mott" – Queen (from left) Freddie Mercury, Roger Taylor, John Deacon and Brian May, backstage at the Uris Theatre, May 1974.

MOTT THE HOOPLE AND QUEEN TAKE BROADWAY, 1974

After some help from Bowie with '72's anthem All The Young Dudes, raucous rock'n'rollers Mott The Hoople had cracked Britain. But as glam peaked, their assault on the US was reaching critical mass, and on a spring '74 US tour they reached a ferocious peak with a week of gigs at New York's Uris Theatre, with support from Queen. "America was such an eye-opener," say the band, associates and Brian May, but "just as Mott were on the verge of greatness, the band imploded."

Interviews by **MARTIN ASTON** • Portrait by **GIJSBERT HANECROOT**

Gijsbert Hanekroot/Alamy, Getty

Ian Hunter: The usual path upwards in New York is playing the Felt Forum, then Radio City Music Hall and on to Madison Square Garden. Mott's show at Radio City in '73 was a disaster: they overloaded the right-hand speakers and we lost them for the entire gig. So the next time we went, our booking agent suggested we try the Uris Theatre on Broadway.

Phil John: Success in the USA could catapult a group into the stratosphere. And for me, that success, for a moment in time, belonged to Mott.

Luther Grosvenor, AKA Ariel Bender: America was the holy grail. For starters, it was the only other place we'd seen on ➢

"I WANTED SUCCESS JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE DID, UNTIL I GOT IT."

Ian Hunter

telly. I was brought up on a council estate in Worcester, making pork pies in a factory, so when [his former band, and Mott labelmates] Spooky Tooth first went to America, it was mind-blowing: the big cars and skyscrapers, the different accents – audiences *admiring* your accent! A huge deal, like your first child or first marriage.

Morgan Fisher: Our American tour in '73 had Joe Walsh, New York Dolls and Aerosmith, rather than some unknown little band. The main reason Queen got on Mott's UK tour of 1973 was business; they paid [reputedly £3,000], which was commonplace those days. Mott always liked good opening acts because it makes for a good evening.

PJ: Mott and Queen's first tour together was the UK in 1973. At our first rehearsal, I'd never seen anything like it; Queen were fully dressed in stage gear, Fred in black nail varnish, the full act. Mott strolled on in jeans and sneakers; it was the music that was important. But Queen were lovely guys, Fred was a bit aloof, but understandable, as he was the frontman.

Stan Tippins: I thought, This band are going to make it with their attitude. They were already stars in their own heads, not arrogant but very confident.

IH: So, we took Queen with us to America [their joint tour began on April 16, 1974]. I don't know if money changed hands then too.

MF: I watched Queen a few times, and I felt they were always trying too hard, and dressing up in outrageous clothes designed by Zandra Rhodes. They seemed almost desperate to get the audience onside.

IH: I never saw Queen as a threat. A lot of great bands supported us. Opening acts for Bowie, for example, would get 45 per cent of the lights and the sound, but our support bands got the same as us. But I'm sure Fred was battling us for first place! He was outrageous, 24 hours a day. He didn't even know he was funny, which was the great thing about it.

Brian May: [America] was extraordinary, beyond our wildest dreams. But I hadn't learned the technique of touring… you can't just learn to play, you have to learn to be an actor, and to project your stage act to every single person in the hall. We might have looked like a million dollars – or Fred did, I don't know about me – but we had nothing. I was a fish swimming in a sea with no understanding whatsoever.

Giving their regards to Broadway: (above, from left to right) Freddie Mercury all white on the night, Uris Theatre, May 1974; Ian Hunter gets into the "fun" spirit of rock'n'roll, May 10, '74; boogaloo boys: Mott The Hoople (from left) Bender, Hunter, Overend and Buffin on-stage at their peak; (above and right) seventh LP *The Hoople*, plus singles and live LP of the residency; (left) attendees Led Zep's Robert Plant and manager Peter Grant – "we were nervous with that," says Hunter.

IH: Fred just couldn't understand why Queen weren't huge immediately – his impatience and frustration were incredible. In a party in my hotel room in Denver, Fred was marching up and down, saying, "Why don't these silly bastards get it?" Fred, I said, you must go around America a couple of times; it's a big country.

ST: Aerosmith were added to the bill at the Farm Show Arena in Harrisburg. Their contract, and Queen's, both stated that neither were to play first, so it was a stand-off. At the last minute, a local band played 20 minutes, to save face; I think Queen went on first.

PJ: Aerosmith's singer [Steven Tyler] was arrogant, swearing away, about how they shouldn't be supporting anyone, and claiming they were far bigger than Mott anyway!

IH: [On May 7] we hit New York. Sammy Davis Jr was on when we went to have a look at the Uris. The space looked like our old haunt, the Fairfield Hall in Croydon, so we knew we could handle it. But we had no real idea of the significance of Broadway until the dress rehearsal, when the TV networks were there – CBS, ABC, NBC. It was larger than just a gig.

LG: Broadway for seven shows; this is a tall order. Will we get a full house for even two nights? Even the Stones or The Who might have worried. But I think I'm right in saying it was a full house every night. And it was fucking fantastic.

MF: We had three weeks to warm up before we got to Broadway so we were totally confident, ready to rock. All we had to do was rehearse with the puppets.

IH: Being a theatre, I wanted to do something theatrical. And we had a song called Marionette, off *The Hoople* album. We had the Pickwick Puppet Theatre make life-size puppets. I sang [Mott ballad] Rose to a pink ostrich sitting on the monitor. You had to be careful, as you were playing with all these guys, dressed in black, manning the puppets around the stage. And we had circus acts in the foyer, like jugglers.

BM: We thought we were unusual, but a lot of the people that came were surprising, even to us – a lot of transvestite artists, New York Dolls, Andy Warhol – people that were creative in a way that appeared to trash everything that had gone before.

MF: That said, the first night was strange because the crowd was mostly record business people, these cynical types wanting us to prove ourselves, which made us nervous.

IH: [Ex-Mott guitarist] Mick Ralphs, who had

Estate of David Gahr/Getty, Getty (5), Alamy

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Ian Hunter (vocals, guitar)**

- **Luther Grosvenor, AKA Ariel Bender (guitar)**

- **Morgan Fisher (piano)**

- **Blue Weaver (organ)**

- **Stan Tippins (Mott tour manager)**

- **Phil John (Mott roadie)**

- **Brian May (Queen guitarist)**

joined Bad Company – the whole group turned up the first night, with Led Zeppelin; both bands were managed by Peter Grant. So, we were nervous with that too.

PJ: There were some snidey comments from John [Bonham], like, "You're not ready to be doing a show as big as this" because the Uris was a prestigious gig.

IH: John Bonham had had a few, and he wanted to play drums on All The Young Dudes, but [Mott drummer, Dale Griffin] Buffin wouldn't have it, so John kicked Buff on the leg and this big bulge grew on his leg, and we still had the show to do!

ST: Someone [actually, Jimmy Page] tried to break one of the marionettes up. I was furious and had a big row with Jimmy Page. A few more drinks calmed it all down.

PJ: We had limousines with a police escort taking us right through New York without stopping at one traffic light! One morning, I found two police unconscious on the floor of the hotel, drunk as skunks. America was such an eye-opener, with groupies and stuff, given England was quite staid. In America, 15 girls would be wedged in the dressing room and we kept throwing them out. Mott loved it to an extent, but it was overpowering too.

IH: We put Union Jacks on the bonnets of the limos and played the Wedding March all the way from Gramercy Park on Lexington Avenue up to the Uris [on 51st Street]. The crowd got bigger every night, waiting for us to arrive, a thousand people by the end. It was magic, but we always worried we weren't good enough for it. If we'd done something like Broadway more often, we'd have enjoyed it more, but it was intense.

Blue Weaver: You could see some cracks there. Quite often Buffin, who could be the most charming guy, could lose his temper – one show, he kicked all his drums over. Was it frustration with Ian? And the vibe on-stage between Ian and Luther, I could never tell either. Luther would be up-front, soloing, stand in front of Ian, hiding him from the audience.

IH: The cheeky bastard, I thought! Eventually, I reacted.

LG: I wanted to show off a bit, bend a few notes, and then one night, suddenly Ian put his arm around my neck and pulled me to the ground! I'm on my back playing on, before he pulls me back up by my collar – the audience loved it. Ian said, "That was amazing, let's do it again" – what, every night? But there was never bad blood. We had a fantastic on-stage partnership.

IH: The spirit of rock'n'roll is fun. As much as I missed Mick Ralphs, Luther raised the stage show 20 per cent.

BW: Bender was like Nigel Tufnel from Spinal Tap, going, "I'm turning up to 11 and I'll be louder than all of you." There were a few Tap moments with Mott.

LG: That was the thing about Queen – great musicians and great songs, but too polished and mechanical for me. Every night, they would watch Mott from the side of the stage. Brian said, "How do you play rock'n'roll like that?" It's just what I do, I said. Even though seven shows at the same venue could become mechanical, every night on Broadway we pulled it out the bag.

BM: With Mott The Hoople, I was conscious we were in the presence of something great. Something to breathe in. We picked up a lot from them about stagecraft and how to connect with an audience. We took some of their tricks and started using them.

IH: At the Watergate Hotel in Washington DC, suddenly, we heard Brian was sick. Queen had to fly home, and the rest of us had to have jabs. Queen's replacement was [AOR band] Kansas – not a fan, I'm afraid.

PJ: And then, just as Mott were on the verge of greatness, the band imploded.

ST: Ian needed another guitarist, and Luther wasn't creative in the studio. Everyone thought Mick Ronson joining was a good idea, until the conflict between Buffin and [Mott bassist] Pete [AKA Overend] Watts on one side and Ian and Ronno on the other… in the end, Ian said he'd had enough [he left on December 1974]. We had been promised even bigger gigs in America, like Madison Square Garden…

MF: I played keyboards on Queen's 1982 American tour and, actually, stadium gigs are no fun: you can't see the audience, you're in a bubble with high security, whilst Mott The Hoople were like an open door. Even on Broadway, the audience had their elbows on the stage, and you can relate, one to one – that's the greatest experience of all.

IH: It's not in my make-up to do what Queen did. I wanted success just like everyone else did, until I got it.

MF: That whole '74 tour was the peak of Mott The Hoople's performing potential: we retained our "wildidity" – as Overend used to say – and Ian's lyrical depth. That week on Broadway, we really did nail it… if all had gone well, we would have sold out Madison Square Garden in '75. In the end, it was not to be – but in April 2019, we raged across Blighty and America again, and got the best reviews of our career. Mott's still hot. Ⓜ

Ian Hunter's Defiance Part 1 is out now on Sun Records. Brian May quotes courtesy of Mark Blake, whose Magnifico! The A-Z Of Queen is published by Nine Eight Books.

Make way for the mother superior: Siouxsie Sioux in 1979; (opposite) on-stage at Cruel World Festival, Pasadena, May 21, 2023.

UNDER HER SPELL

MARKING SIOUXSIE SIOUX'S SHOCK RETURN TO THE STAGE, WRITERS AND BAND MEMBERS SALUTE THE POST-PUNK ICON'S MASTERY AND MYSTERY, AND CELEBRATE THE SWIRLING, SHADOWY SOUND OF HER BANSHEES. BUT FIRST, MARK PAYTRESS ON SIOUXSIE'S RISE, REVIVAL AND THE WOMAN BEHIND THE IMPERIOUS PERSONA: "I'M NOT THE CARTOON CHARACTER EVERYONE WOULD LIKE ME TO BE."

HER HEAD BOWED AND HOODED, SHE CUTS A SOLEMN, IMPASSIVE figure as a grave, bass-heavy fog of sound slowly brings her to life. The crowd greets her as they've always done in this part of the world: "Sook-zee!", they yell, a bizarrely pet-like take on one of the most imperious names in rock, before the name-calling melts into a rapturous roar of approval. For The Icon, head to toe in shimmering silver like a space-age nun, is at the mike and beginning the First Lesson. "Only at night-time I see you…"

Nightshift – key lines "Fuck the mothers/Kill the others" – is prime 'Imperial Era' Banshees, a long and grinding beast from *Juju*, the band's 1981 Top 10 album and as archetypal as anything they released during a trailblazing and drama-filled 20-year career.

Until this first week in May, Siouxsie's been away from the stage for a decade. The atmosphere in the intimate Teatro Degli Arcimboldi in Milan – one of three warm-up dates before a busy summer playing festivals and touring at home – crackles with expectation. "Royalty!" yells one enthusiastic punter to loud cheers. The previous day, back in London, a new King was crowned. Tonight, we bear witness to a Restoration: the Ice Queen is back.

Accompanied by musicians who'd worked on her 2007 solo album, *Mantaray* – guitarist/keyboard player Stephen Evans, who produced it, bassist Joe Short and drummer Robert Brian, who toured it, and guitarist Chris Turtell – Siouxsie performs a mix of hits (Arabian Knights, Dear Prudence, Kiss Them For Me, Spellbound) and deeper cuts (But Not Them, Face To Face, Here Comes That Day). All the old moves are here: hanging on the mike stand, hands pressed against her temples in anguish. Her famous pendulum dance is especially apt, a reminder of time passing. Now, her hair flatteringly moon-coloured with black streaks, she gives off a strong Elsa Lanchester vibe, the exquisite titular character in the 1935 horror classic, The Bride Of Frankenstein.

Siouxsie always wanted to put the frighteners on. "We always wanted to see X-rated films!" she told me in 2014, explaining why the young Susan Ballion from leafy Chislehurst in Kent X'd up her name. Primarily, though, it was the association with the Native American tribes, the perennial 'baddies' in Hollywood westerns, that prompted Susie to become Sioux.

At the height of punk rock, in 1977 and '78, Siouxsie would roll into Anytown, Britain, her face vividly painted for conflict, her arrows sharpened. She'd howl menacingly over the Banshees' harsh, angular, tom-tom-heavy dirges while audiences showed their love and/or hate by spitting and hurling bottles at her and the band – bassist Steven Severin, drummer Kenny Morris and guitarist John McKay – three ➢

Fin Costello/Getty, Jason Zinn

"I always described Siouxsie as being a cross between a big sister and the worst headmistress."
BANSHEE JON KLEIN

Let us prey: (clockwise from above) Sioux on-stage 1978; Siouxsie And The Banshees, 1979 (from left) John McKay, Steve Severin, Kenny Morris, Sioux; in 1983 (from left) Sioux, Budgie, Severin, Robert Smith; Sioux with Yoko Ono, London 2013; in '85 (from left) Severin, Sioux, Budgie, John Carruthers; Sioux icon Nico, 1982; Banshees, 1988 (from left) Michael McCarrick, Severin, Sioux, Budgie, Jon Klein.

quiet, intense young men in dark clothing. Johnny Rotten was clearly the movement's figurehead. But Siouxsie, all animus rising, was at least as striking, with added claws, class and cult appeal.

"She was a star even before she'd sung anything," said her friend and fellow punk face Simon Barker, who recalled her going to school with five colours in her hair and an extreme, likely Bowie-influenced cut. By her mid-teens, she shopped at Biba, had her hair styled at Vidal Sassoon and took her cues from the "incredibly free and tomboyish" flappers and panda-eyed vamps of 1920s silent cinema. "I loved all that!" she told me, adding that she had a strong dislike of Laura Ashley-style '70s fashions. "I'm a feminist because I'm a woman," she said, "not because I think all women are brilliant."

MORE THAN THREE DECADES EARLIER, IN SEPTEMBER 1978, at Cardiff's Top Rank, Siouxsie's fearlessness was very much in evidence. The Banshees were promoting debut album *The Scream* and had invited Nico as the tour's special guest. Some three songs into her set, during which time Nico had been constantly pelted with beer and bottles, Sioux leapt onto the stage and yelled: "Shut up and listen! This woman's a fucking legend!" It was to no avail. A couple of songs later, Nico walked off with a blunt, "If I had a machine gun, I'd shoot you all."

As we'd later discover, Siouxsie had plenty of reasons to sympathise with the underdog. In early 2003, months after the Banshees regrouped for two 'Seven Year Itch' comeback gigs in London, your writer was summoned to meet her in a hotel just off Pall Mall. The band had done a deal for an authorised biography and needed someone to pull it all together. Her opening words – "He's not like Elvis Costello at all!" – denoted approval. And her forthrightness set the tone for the conversations that became the book. Especially candid about her childhood – much of which shed light on her later mistrust of authority figures and 'the crowd' – she recounted one particular episode that does much to explain the Sioux enigma.

Sensitive to music since the age of five, having been "haunted" by the ghostly sounds of John Leyton's 1961 death disc, Johnny Remember Me, Susan Ballion experienced a disturbing epiphany in her mid-teens. Her bacteriologist father, well-read but an emotionally distant drinker, had died in spring 1972. Shortly afterwards, she suffered a severe bout of ulcerative colitis, an auto-immune condition that landed her in hospital through the summer months. Having undergone a blood transfusion, an operation and deep trauma, she took refuge in the television room one evening early in July. It happened to be the night David Bowie slung his arm around Mick Ronson while performing Starman on Top Of The Pops.

"The skinniness, the otherworldliness," she elaborated. "The words unisex and bisexual arrived together. I thought that was really interesting. I perceived it as the new man/new woman of the future. Bowie and Bolan did so much with gender stereotypes."

Years later, in 2005, Siouxsie would be recognised for her own contribution to the semiotics of style, as recipient of MOJO's Icon award. She accepted it with good grace, but later confided: "I'm a bit concerned it's for being an icon, and not for the music."

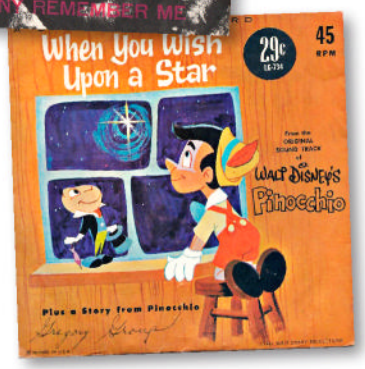
THE TWO ELEMENTS, FOR SIOUX, WERE INSEPARABLE. She was, of course, perfect pop pin-up material, regularly featuring on magazine covers from ZigZag to The Face. At the same time, her charisma played an overriding role both in the band's work and their longevity. That's why the Banshees' music and Siouxsie's look and attitude were such a perfect fit. Without diminishing the vital role played by co-conspirator Steven Severin, and the various supporting musicians, she is both Siouxsie and The Banshee – in Irish folklore, a female spirit driven to wail laments.

Even on a more practical level, her contributions have been key. When John McKay joined the band, in July 1977, it was Sioux who set him a challenge. "I played him the soundtrack from [Hitchcock's] Psycho and said, We want the guitars to sound like that!" she remembered: "Stabbing violins!"

McKay came back with the metallic, sometimes atonal guitar signature that remained a key feature throughout the band's career. On Jigsaw Feeling from *The Scream* album, a cornerstone of the post-punk sound is established: imitated, refined and sanitised by many acts ever since.

Siouxsie's influence functioned on a subliminal level too. At an early stage in the life of the band, Severin grasped the value of

Adrian Boot/urbanimage.tv, Ebet Roberts/Getty, Getty, Alamy, Richard Haughton/Bridgeman Images, Tom Sheehan, Barry Plummer



matching the band's sound with the Sioux persona. "Everyone thought that Siouxsie wrote Red Light because it was from a feminist perspective," he said. "But that was me writing for her."

Having helped create such a distinctive sound, Morris and McKay sensationally quit the band in September 1979 midway through a tour. The calamity, sparked by the pair handing out free copies of new album *Join Hands* at a signing session in an Aberdeen record shop, didn't just threaten the Banshees' existence. For Sioux, who reacted to what she perceived as treachery by writing a song called Drop Dead, the episode was galvanising. "Never underestimate the effect of the walk-out," Severin told me in 2014. "It solidified everything." But it also reopened old wounds. Though at school she'd made attempts to be a team player – adept at hockey and netball – she spent much of her youth as a kind of pariah. Even the family home – leaking roof, conspicuously overgrown garden – was "sick", she realised later, so much so that her friends were discouraged from visiting.

This demand for total loyalty also explained the Banshees' reputation for resenting their more commercially successful peers, like Robert Smith, who had two spells as a stand-in Banshee before revamping The Cure and enjoying international fame. "It was more than lipstick that he took from the Banshees," said Severin.

Conflict was rarely far away in and around the Banshees camp. Both Severin and Sioux – as guardians of the band's vision – were known for their moods. "I always described her as being a cross between a big sister and the worst headmistress," said Jon Klein, guitarist between 1987 and 1994. "That sounds about right," Sioux admitted. Severin believed that antagonism was an intrinsic part of the Banshees make-up: "It kept us on our toes."

Ultimately, the biggest source of tension was the one that was – at least for much of the band's career – the most understated: the Sioux/Severin relationship. Initially, the pair were an item, before splitting during the *Scream* tour. Midway through the *Juju* tour, in 1981, Siouxsie and drummer Peter Clarke, AKA Budgie, began a low-key relationship. Severin has always insisted it had no bearing on group dynamics. But a rift developed. "I became more assertive and I think he found that hard to deal with," said Sioux. "We can both be really stubborn. The locked horns were starting to draw blood!"

She also despaired when, during sessions for 1991's *Superstition*, she saw Severin working on the album sat at a computer with a mouse. "We were like chalk and cheese then," Sioux said. She missed "the physicality, the choreography of hands" over a big old mixing desk.

Shortly after finishing work on 1995 follow-up *The Rapture*, the band split. Initially, Sioux felt a sense of liberation. By now, she and Budgie were living in the French countryside and working on their on/off project The Creatures. Then came the clouds of retrospection. "Massive self-doubt," she said. "That was a huge shock when you're so confident. But it was the confidence of innocence, really. I was growing up."

WHEN I CAUGHT UP WITH SIOUX AGAIN IN 2014 FOR a MOJO cover story, she was grieving – not for the Banshees nor for the collapse of her marriage to Budgie, but for the recent passing of her 22-year-old rescue cat Spider. "It's a real bereavement," she said. "I've been howling at the moon for weeks. I'd have had his kittens if I could."

That same day, she spoke about the emotional effect of those "weepy" choral voices behind Jiminy Cricket on When You Wish Upon A Star from Disney's Pinocchio. "I'm not the cartoon character that everyone would like me to be," she said. "That's only a public persona. There's a lot of warmth in the Banshees…"

Back in Milan, a lone voice calls out between Sin In My Heart and Christine. "Don't talk," says Siouxsie. "Just shut up and listen."

There's a smile on her face.

IN THE BEGINNING

FROM THE CRUCIBLE OF PUNK, ONE OF ITS KEY FACES EMERGED TO INSPIRE THE NEXT DECADE OF MUSIC AND MORE. FROM HIS ENGLAND'S DREAMING TAPES, JON SAVAGE SALVAGES THE FIRST TRULY REVEALING SIOUXSIE SIOUX INTERVIEW...

ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE EARLY STAGES OF LONDON punk is that it was a haven for outsiders. Everything was new and up for grabs: music, fashion, aesthetics and gender politics. These freedoms were gleefully taken up by a number of women, who in 1976 and 1977 acted out in public in a way that had never been seen before. Together with the non-macho masculinity presented by Buzzcocks and Subway Sect, the effect of Poly Styrene, Gaye Advert, Pauline Murray and The Slits was incredibly exciting.

Siouxsie Sioux was one of the most prominent, if not the most prominent among these pioneers. During 1977 I saw her performances grow from tentative thrash into a powerful theatre of suburban repression and sexual domination. No woman had done this before. The Banshees – Sioux, Steve Severin, John McKay and Kenny Morris – were one of the very best groups in the country in 1977 and 1978, during which period they went from outcasts seemingly unable to get a record contract to Top 10 pop stars. They were terrific.

Because of her central part – not least her backchat to host Bill Grundy on the December 1, 1976 Today show that precipitated Pistol Steve Jones's verbal torrent – Siouxsie was on the top of my list of interviews for the book that became England's Dreaming. It was easy to arrange, and she was as forthcoming and as sharp as I had hoped, happy to re-emphasise the sheer strangeness and excitement of being a total teen outsider in her time and place.

Everyone talks about punk being working-class, but to me it was very suburban.

I always gravitated towards the city, I hated suburbia. Some people stuck to their local town, like Bromley. You could hang out there and feel pretty grown up, but I hated it. I thought it was small and narrow-minded. There was this trendy wine bar called Pips or something, and I got [fellow punk pathfinder] Berlin [AKA Bertie Marshall] to wear this dog collar, and I walked in with Berlin following me, and people's jaws just hit the tables. Later on if I'd have done that I'd probably have been assaulted. But I walked in and ordered a bowl of water for him. It was hilarious.

What did you get into?

Edgar Allan Poe, and having an older brother and sister there was always music there: R&B, Tamla Motown, The Rolling Stones and The Beatles. But stories, gruesome stories. Old books of my father's, Aztec mutilation rites, done in matchstick diagrams, someone's entrails being ripped out. I hated the street we lived in, bordering on middle-class. More puritanical than proper middle-class in a way, almost spiteful.

What did your dad do?

He was a laboratory technician, he used to work up at St Albans in a mental asylum. He used to tell me stories about autopsies and things. He died when I was about 14. Up until then I was up on medical things, zoology and things.

Did his dying affect you a lot?

I suppose it must have done. I felt guilty that I didn't grieve. It must have been 10 years later I wished I could have known him.

"COMING OFF THE STAGE [AFTER BILL GRUNDY] IT WAS REALLY BRILLIANT. IT WAS THE FIRST THING I FELT I'D REALLY ACHIEVED."
SIOUXSIE

What did you do in adolescence? Go and see groups?

Not really, I didn't hang out with people. The time I started going out to concerts, I'd go to Biba's, I'd started getting interested in clothes and things. The Rainbow Room. I used to think what a gorgeous building it was. I was besotted with the Art Deco, Art Nouveau. That was my escape from humdrum.

Did you buy Biba's clothes?

Only from their bargain bins. The rest was jumble sales really. I think Bowie and Roxy had a big part in that. Whoever latched onto them then were that way inclined. The whole thing, not just the music. It aroused something that was quite dormant, that was causing frustration.

Who did you like better, Roxy or Bowie?

I suppose I was more of a Bowie fan, there was that much more material. They used to play a lot of their music at Biba's. The New York Dolls played there, though I didn't see them. I know Steven [Severin] did. I was attracted to the music they played there.

When did you leave school?

At the end of the fifth year, in '73. I hung around at home for a bit, and my mum was trying to get me to go to secretarial college, and I did go to one for a few months. You can imagine, shorthand, typing… God. I never stayed long enough to do any exams or anything. I thought I might be a model or something. I'd go round to the agencies, and already I was into heavy make-up, bright colours. They said I was too skinny and too made-up. They wanted busty and natural models. But I would have hated that anyway. So I worked in pubs and clubs in the West End, the Valbonne. I'd bring my record collection and dance to it on the floor by myself. Bowie, Brass Construction, those sort of things. Hard Work by John Handy. I got the sack after either the Bill Grundy or when I was in the paper for some reason, it was adverse publicity.

Who did you meet first, Steve Severin or Simon Barker?

Simon I think. I met them through a girl I was at school with. I bumped into one of them on a train. That was when I started going to Vidal Sassoon's to get my hair done, different tints. But I saw them again at the Roxy Music concert. That would be '74, where they had the big video screen. They didn't hang out in London, they just hung out in various bars in Bromley. I led them astray, up to the West End. There was Rod's in King's Road up where the old Sex shop was. Another way I ran into Steve and Simon was they worked at RCA and I asked them to get a copy of John, I'm Only Dancing.

When did you first find out about the Sex Pistols?

I'd been to the shop before I knew about the group. I'd bought some fishnet tights with gold and black tassels on them. They'd had a fashion spread, really nice drainpipe trousers, pink satin with black lace over the top, and the Gene Vincent shirts. I found the shop independently of knowing about the group.

Was Jordan in there?

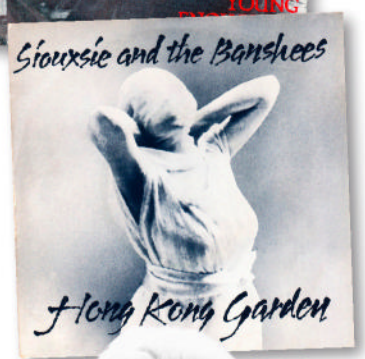
I don't think so. I

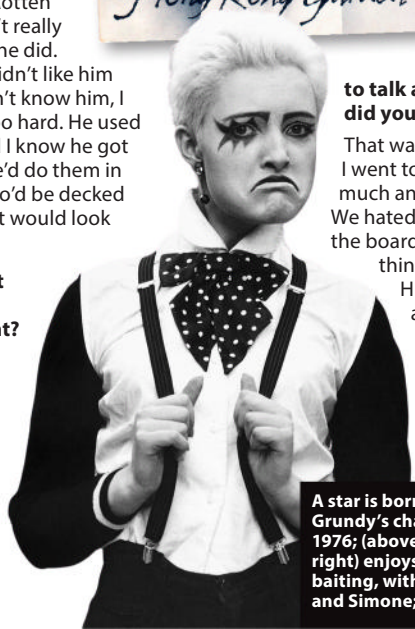
Michael Putland/Retna/Avalon, Camera Press/Steve Emberton

Suburban relapse: Siouxsie Sioux, 1978; (opposite) Sioux in 1980 with fellow pioneers (from left) Chrissie Hynde, Debbie Harry, Viv Albertine, Poly Styrene and Pauline Black.

Straight outta Bromley: (above) the 'Contingent' (from left) Debbie Juvenile, Sioux, Steve Severin, Linda Ashby, Sue Catwoman, Sharon Hayman, Simon Barker, Philip Sallon, Berlin.

"I WENT FOR THIS POLICEMAN'S BALLS AND GOT DRAGGED, KICKING AND SCREAMING, INTO THE MEAT WAGON." SIOUXSIE





A star is born: Siouxsie unamused at Bill Grundy's chat-up on Today, December 1, 1976; (above from left) Sioux (back row, right) enjoys the Sex Pistols' Grundy-baiting, with Bromley pals Simon, Severin and Simone; outside Biba, Kensington.

Ray Stevenson (4), Barry Plummer, Alamy (2), Shutterstock

remember Vivienne, she looked gorgeous. I was really attracted. She had blonde hair with purple-pink lips. She looked great. Simon and Steve told me about the Pistols, they'd been to see them at Bromley Art College, I think, and they'd been to see them at the Paradiso. The first time I saw them was some college again, it might have been Beckenham. There was just a few students wandering about, and everyone kept their distance. It wasn't aggressive or anything, it was just an end of term thing. It was at the 100 Club that all the insulting the audience started. It became much more of an event. They just played their music. Rotten didn't like it, but he didn't really glare at anyone the way he did. Glen was the loudest. I didn't like him very much, though I didn't know him, I thought he was trying too hard. He used to do backing vocals and I know he got asked not to do them. He'd do them in tune. He was the one who'd be decked out in the Sex gear, and it would look squeaky clean on him.

When did you first start attracting attention as the Bromley Contingent? When was that phrase coined?

That was Caroline Coon when we went to Paris. A lot of people have got away with dismissing it and making it what it wasn't, just by coining that phrase. I didn't like being called the Bromley Contingent. It was the beginning of the labels really. And look at it now, there are so many labels. It was nicer when it confused people. It was a club for misfits, almost. Anyone that didn't conform to any mass Mecca to belong to, it was waifs. There was male gays, female gays, bisexuals, non-sexuals, every-thing. No-one was criticised for their sexual preferences. The only thing looked down on was being plain boring, that reminded them of suburbia.

I suppose we've got to talk about the swastika. When did you start wearing that?

That was from right early on, when I went to Paris. It was always very much an anti-mums and dads thing. We hated older people – not across the board, but generally the suburban thing, always harping on about Hitler, and 'we showed him' and that smug pride.

When did you become aware that there was something more? Did you get into arguments about it?

No, I became aware when skinheads latched onto it, and took it quite seriously, and it was used politically, and started talking about race, and I thought, Whaat? Hang about. I'm completely the opposite in my views on race.

How did your performance at the 100 Club come about?

There was a vacant space for a group, and it was being discussed at Louise's. Perhaps someone had pulled out. Malcolm was saying, "We need another band," and I volunteered. "We've got a band." And we hadn't, we spent the night trying to find a band. It was the next day rehearsing with Sid [Vicious] on drums. Billy [Idol] said yes at the time and came back a day later and either couldn't be contacted or was too embarrassed to say no. Obviously he wasn't interested. Marco [Pirroni] we knew, he was a friend of Sue Catwoman's, and Sid, and me and Steven.

Had you known Sid already?

We'd seen him around at the gigs, and knew him vaguely but not well. He was such a nice boy, a real sweetie. I think he just believed all the hype about being violent and ended up being someone that no-one knew, really. It was a real shame. It was when he got involved with that horrible woman, Nancy, when he discovered girls it all went to pot.

When did you first call yourself Siouxsie?

I invented it that night when we came back with the title for the group. The Cry Of The Banshee had been on [television] a couple of nights before, and we just thought banshee was a great word. The film wasn't much good – Patrick Mower grovelling in mud a lot of the time. The name just stuck.

What was the gig like? Sid played rather minimally, didn't he?

He was very much a fan of Moe Tucker. Boom, splat. I liked it. I think out of everything, it

Primal screamers: (above) early Banshees (from left) Dixon, Peter Fenton, Sioux, Severin; (below left) Siouxsie with (from left) journalist Jonh Ingham, Severin and Johnny Rotten at the Pistols' Screen On The Green gig, August 29, 1976.

captured the spirit of how to do things. It was a shambles but something much more memorable than doing half a dozen songs they'd rehearsed. It was like Sister Ray. Listening back to the tape I could hear Smoke On The Water, just in wafts, but it all fitted. It was taking the piss out of all the things we hated.

So you became minor celebrities.

Infamy was what it was. Bill Grundy was after that. I was blonde then, with one eye and a star, I was very pert and very cheeky, very Larry Grayson. This horrible old man trying to chat me up and I was going, "Well, really! Whooo!" Rather than, "Fuck off, you dirty old man. Get you!" I remember coming off the stage and it was really brilliant. It was the first thing I felt I'd really achieved. I was scared, going on, but it was addictive. I couldn't believe it. People were saying you ought to get a group together. It had just been something to fill that gap for one night, but I didn't bank on getting hooked on it.

Did you feel that it was snowballing by the time of Grundy?

I just thought, Blimey, everyone seems to want to know what's going on. How do you prepare yourself for that sort of attention? It could have remained as our own private youth club, or whatever, but seeing yourself in a newspaper, and the wrong comments that are there, the wrong title that you're given. "They like to drink brown ale and throw up" – no we don't!

When did the Banshees get really good?

There were always bits when they were good, when [early guitarist, Peter] Fenton wasn't too erratically self-conscious. We sacked our guitarist on-stage. He just went into a guitar solo, and I still hate that. This horrible Led Zeppelin thing. We just steamed into him, unplugged his guitar.

What happened when you got arrested at the Rainbow?

We supported The Heartbreakers. 999 played. We finished, we were waiting for a cab outside, and this meat wagon turned up and [999's] drummer, Pablo [LaBritain], they just started pushing him around and I went over, said, "Leave him alone, we're just waiting for our transport," and they started getting quite nasty, and I went for them, went for this policeman's balls and got dragged, kicking and screaming, into the meat wagon. I spent the night in Holloway and in the local nick in Islington, and they were threatening to strip search me, and making very lewd comments about what I was wearing. That was the first time in a long time that I'd felt sexually threatened. One was going, "If you don't shut her up, I'll bang her head against the wall."

When you were eventually signed to Polydor, did you find that situation easy to work with?

It was always a matter of going into Polydor with clenched fists behind your back. If anyone said anything you didn't like, you wouldn't stand for it. A lot of it was holding out for what we wanted, and a lot of people weren't interested, it was a bit of both. I was very proud.

But when did you think that the movement finished?

I never saw it as a movement. As long as there were bands that excited me, then it was great, and Talking Heads are still good, the Ramones are repeating themselves much too much now. Iggy Pop is still there, with flashes of brilliance. *The Idiot* and *Lust For Life*, that was what you listened to.

Was that dominatrix thing something that you were conscious of, that you wanted to express?

It wasn't self-conscious, just what was going on. It was what suited me, and it was definitely anti-tabloid, typical girl. The Slits were very different, they weren't glamorous, they were very earthy. And the boys hated the male who would read The Sun as well. We hated that kind of thing, the lowest common denominator.

From The England's Dreaming Tapes by Jon Savage, published by Faber.

THY KINGDOM COME

ON SEPTEMBER 20, 1976, AT OXFORD STREET'S 100 CLUB, JONH INGHAM WITNESSED THE BIRTH OF THE BANSHEES – THE LORD'S PRAYER, TWIST AND SHOUT, DEUTSCHLAND ÜBER ALLES AND ALL.

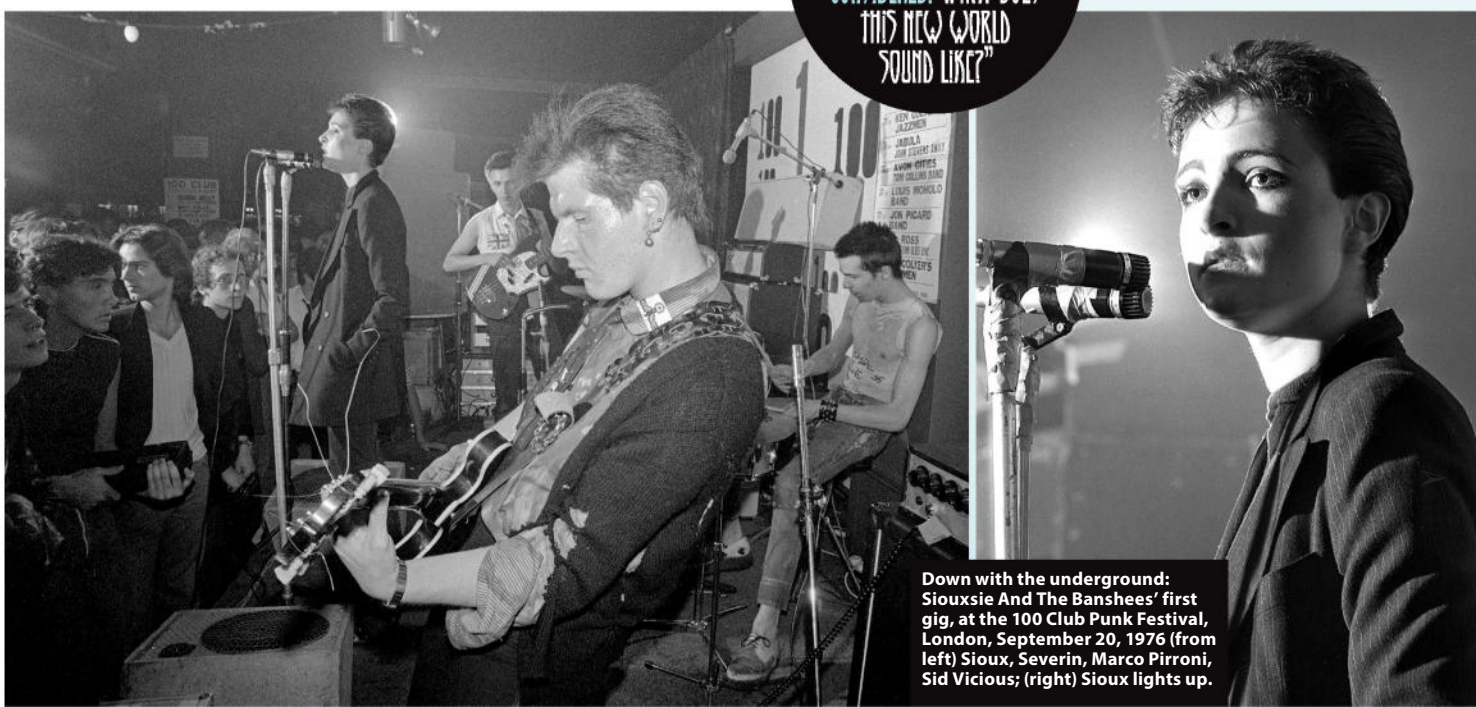
WITH FLAME-touched hair she stands at the stage edge, hands in pockets as her black-edged eyes stare at the back wall and very red lips desecrate The Lord's Prayer. A few days ago she was Susan Ballion of suburban Chislehurst, deciphering how to write herself into a heroic name and a new identity. It's Siouxsie Sioux that strides into the 100 Club for her first time on a stage.

Behind Siouxsie are three young men with the pinky-white pallor of people indifferent to sunlight. They think the punk aesthetic is so simple they can do it too. Bassist Steve Severin learned a few chords yesterday, determined to be on a stage before he turns 21. That's next week. Drummer Sid Vicious has been telling everyone that drumming is easy – "You just go boom! splat!" – and to our surprise he's actually keeping a tempo. Marco Pirroni is the lone musician among them, conjuring drones and feedback over which Siouxsie sings the stupidest lyrics she can think of: Knocking On Heaven's Door, Twist And Shout, and a provocative verse of Deutschland Über Alles.

With amusing hubris the 100 Club has promoted a two-day Punk Festival. There aren't 10 punk bands in existence. But in the excited exuberance of those pushing punk it's a virtue that Siouxsie And The Banshees have never played and can't play. The music – can we call it that? – is by turns interesting, boring, annoying. At the same time it's the most imaginative noise in the house, because they ask a question none of us championing punk has considered: What does this new world sound like? Is it rewritten Faces and Mott The Hoople, or is it Kraftwerk and Nico and The Velvet Underground? And while it doesn't sound like it, the Banshees have already answered it. In their one rehearsal session they didn't practise playing, they talked about how they would sound. It's a key element of what makes artists great – deciding who you are and what you're going to present to the world.

Siouxsie's first gig lasted 20 minutes. It was meant to be so horrible the band would be pulled off-stage. Instead it sparked a lifelong career. As she told the Evening Standard 28 years later in 2004 (and will probably say it again in 2024), "Don't try to pigeonhole me. Don't call me Goth or Punk or Ice Queen. Sure, I feel punk in attitude. I'm still fighting against mediocrity."

"THEY ASK A QUESTION NONE OF US CHAMPIONING PUNK HAS CONSIDERED: WHAT DOES THIS NEW WORLD SOUND LIKE?"



Down with the underground: Siouxsie And The Banshees' first gig, at the 100 Club Punk Festival, London, September 20, 1976 (from left) Sioux, Severin, Marco Pirroni, Sid Vicious; (right) Sioux lights up.

SCREAMING IN SPACE

IN THIS INTERVIEW FOR JOHN ROBB'S NEW BOOK THE ART OF DARKNESS, THE BANSHEES BASSIST AND SOMETIME SIOUXSIE BEAU TOOK THE AUTHOR THROUGH THE BAND'S FORMATION AND FLOWERING. "IT WAS *MEANT* TO BE ABRASIVE," INSISTS STEVE SEVERIN.

ANOTHER DISAFFECTED SOUTH-east London teen looking to music to establish his distance from suburban Britain, Steven John Bailey appeared destined to squire Siouxsie Sioux to stardom. But for the future Banshees bass man, it all began with glam…

THE FACT THAT Bowie came from Bromley was more weird than inspiring really. When he was in the charts with Space Oddity in 1969, I was only in the third year but there was a lot of gossiping about his life at the school, like when he had driven a Mini onto the school bandstand one lunchtime.

A lot of people talk about their defining moment of seeing Bowie on Top Of The Pops doing Starman, but my defining moment was Roxy Music doing Virginia Plain in August 1972 because I could see and hear the progression from the kind of music I was into before. They were slightly prog but there was something more going on and that really appealed to me. You have to credit Bowie, though, he was always name-dropping people in interviews. That's how I got into reading William Burroughs' Naked Lunch when I was 16. You were like a hawk. Any little snippet you leapt on it because there was so little of it.

We had a gang of us at school who were avid music devourers from 1969 onwards. One of our posse had an older brother who was stationed in Hamburg in the military. He became a junkie and came back to England in the late summer of 1970 and he brought with him the first Can album *Monster Movie* and The Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat*. We listened to them one Sunday afternoon around a friend's house and it was like, What the fuck is this? It's brilliant!

[The Roxy Music gig at the Rainbow in October 1974] was the day I had decided to never work for anyone else again. So I quit my job and went to the concert. My friend Simon [Barker] knew Siouxsie vaguely and introduced us and the rest is history. That night she looked extraordinary. She had hired a mermaid outfit dress with a long tail, and she had short hair, cut like a crown of thorns, flipped upwards and all the tips were dyed red. A few people had dressed up, but no one looked like Siouxsie and very quickly after that she became part of the gang and a couple of months later, we saw the Sex Pistols.

THE BANSHEES' TRANSITION FROM Sex Pistols superfans to groundbreaking group is one of the founding legends of post-punk. The way Severin remembers it, it was more a matter of accident than master-plan. "You've got to remember," he insists, "we were very young then…"

WE HAD BEEN looking for a way in but I don't think anybody thought, We can do this. Siouxsie had been to a few auditions, answering ads in Melody Maker. Billy [Idol] could play the guitar and there was talk of him teaching me the bass. Siouxsie had been to Billy's house once and had done a version of the Velvets' What Goes On.

The real plan came together when we found out about the 100 Club festival. We knew Malcolm and the Pistols and here was an opportunity. Siouxsie claims she went up to Malcolm and demanded that we play. The way I remember it was that Billy went up to Malcolm and said we've got a band and could we fill a slot? Of course, we didn't have a proper band and then Billy backed out on the Saturday night when we were at Louise's two days before the gig.

[Future Banshees manager] Nils [Stevenson] knew that we were attempting to form a band and he introduced Marco Pirroni to us. We had seen Marco around a lot and he could play the guitar so he was in. Then Sid said, "I will play the drums." We said, "Can you play the drums?" and he said, "Does it matter?!"

On Sunday we were in The Clash's rehearsal studio in Camden for a 10-minute rehearsal. We bashed away, and Sid said, "That's good enough, let's go to the pub." On the Monday we were at the 100 Club playing the gig. It was insane.

As soon as we came off-stage, two things happened. First, Kenny Morris ran up to us. He knew Sid already from playing in Sid's band, The Flowers Of Romance. He said he wanted to play the drums for us instead. We said we don't have any plans to do anything.

Then, the Evening Standard did a quick interview and we said we have split up because we were performance art. Then Nils came up and said, "I want to manage you." Basically, he bullied us into repeating what we had done.

The 100 Club was now the springboard. We thought, Wow, we can get away with that! What would it be like if we could play our instruments and write songs?! Nils found us some time in the Pistols' rehearsal room on Denmark Street while they were touring in Holland in early January 1977. Then, because of his connection with Malcolm, he became fast friends with all the Heartbreakers who were now in town. [Heartbreakers' manager] Leee Childers gave Nils a table in his office at Track Records and gave us money to pay for rehearsals – it was all very fortuitous.

[The musical principal was to] eliminate what you hate. We didn't want guitar solos. We didn't want drum rolls. The first time Kenny had rehearsed with us, Siouxsie took away his hi-hats and cymbals and left him the snare and floor tom. It was about what you *don't* wanna do and what you are left with, which is hopefully unique.

John McKay was a bit younger than us but he had the same sort of musical taste and he was smarter than the other guitarist [Peter Fenton]. He could translate ideas and very quickly he had his own sound and we became the band that made the first album.

Lyrically [*The Scream*, 1978] is quite bleak. You've got to remember, we were very young then. We deliberately didn't make it too commercial. It was *meant* to be abrasive. We were into the idea of that Berlin decadence scene. That was the sort of culture we were interested in.

The presentation was important. We went to the BBC in Manchester to film the Old Grey Whistle Test and we wanted white and blue lights and told them no red, orange and green lights and we got them to change all the gels. Then we got our soundman to do the sound. Because of that, of course, we would get a reputation for being the Ice Queen when, basically, we just knew what we wanted.

Getty

A void in love: Severin and Sioux on-stage at the Rainbow Theatre, London, November 20, 1977.

THE FIRST CLASSIC LINE-UP OF THE Banshees was barely established when McKay and Morris quit – for reasons including their dissatisfaction with the production of second album *Join Hands*. Sioux and Severin forged on with assistance from The Cure's Robert Smith before the transfers of Magazine guitarist John McGeoch and ex-Slits drummer Budgie heralded the dawn of the Banshees' Golden Age…

[*JOIN HANDS* IS] patchy. It sounds like a band falling apart to me. Not that there are no great songs on there. If we had three more months, it would have been a different record – it's the

In every dreamhouse: Siouxsie Sioux and Steve Severin, 1983; (insets, from top) Banshees' influences: Roxy Music's Virginia Plain 45 and Can's *Monster Movie*; the Banshees' 1980 single Christine.

Paul Cox/Avalon

> "We didn't want guitar solos. We didn't want drum rolls. It was about what you *don't* wanna do."
> Steve Severin

second album syndrome I'm afraid. Occasionally Polydor would send an A&R to attend the sessions and we would say, "That's all you are going to hear, you go on back to the office now."

I saw John McGeoch on television, on So It Goes with Magazine and they were doing The Light Pours Out Of Me and I thought, That's the guy, he's fantastic. We cherry-picked the best of the generation to join the band. We had thought about another two potential contenders – Bruce Gilbert from Wire, also Geordie from Killing Joke.

We had to kind of romance John McGeoch into leaving Magazine. For a while there, he was pretty loyal to [Magazine singer] Howard [Devoto] and then came to us. He was from Greenock, so nobody bullied him, not even Siouxsie!

[For the *Kaleidoscope* album] we wrote everything in the studio, which was a new approach for us. We would find the funny synthesizer in the corner that had been left behind by Godley And Creme and use it and come up with something different.

The new band developed pretty organically out of that. Budgie was on board fairly quickly. We knew what we were striving towards and when John joined it all fell into place. I'd always liked the kind of softer – not wigged – psychedelia, the softer English pastoral Kevin Ayers and Syd Barrett stuff. That's what I was thinking of when writing things like Christine – just the little bit of psychedelia in there both lyrically and musically.

We didn't have the '*Sturm und Drang*' of [Morris and McKay] in there. It was much lighter in approach – not light-hearted, just not too intense. We had had enough of that and it caused the band to fucking explode. It was different essentially in that it was just me and Siouxsie in the studio and our relationship was not like that brooding thing. It was more humorous and that was reflected on *Kaleidoscope* and we built the second band out of that.

KALEIDOSCOPE (1980) WAS FOLLOWED by *Juju* (1981) and *A Kiss In The Dreamhouse* (1982) – completing the Banshees' raft of post-punk masterpieces. Although excellent work was to follow, it would be without John McGeoch, victim of an alcohol-exacerbated breakdown. By now they were spoken of as the poster band of 'goth' – much to their chagrin – spawning a back-combed, black-clad army of fans…

IT WAS VERY weird. The Siouxsie lookalikes – we would call them 'Suzettes' and the gigs were chock-a-block full of them. Go to any alternative nightclub in any city around the UK and there would be half a dozen Siouxsie clones in there. Siouxsie was very uncomfortable with it but it was just another evolution.

People forget there was a little phase where it was called 'positive punk'. Southern Death Cult, Sex Gang Children and all those bands then sprung up – the dreaded g-word had not come into it yet. I'm not sure when that happened – probably with Bauhaus and then retrospectively with Joy Division who were called a gothic band, which was weird.

I don't mind anything being called 'Gothic' as that might refer back to the obvious influence of Edgar Allan Poe or Gothic architecture or Gothic painting – anything from the turn of the century. But when it comes shortened to 'goth', it's kind of a pantomime version.

There are so many things in goth you cannot do. You have to fit a certain template and that was something we were fighting against in the late '70s. People could never understand why we didn't want to be associated with it – people would call Siouxsie the 'Queen Of Goth' and she would say, "No I fucking ain't!"

Adapted from The Art Of Darkness: The History Of Goth by John Robb, published by Manchester University Press.

THE UNHOLY BIBLE

TWELVE SELECT, LONG-PLAYING HIGHLIGHTS FROM SIOUXSIE SIOUX AND VARIOUS BANSHEES, BY ANDREW PERRY.

Her primitive best: Siouxsie in 1984.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

THE SCREAM

(Polydor, 1978)

After debuting in September '76, it took Siouxsie Sioux and Steve Severin over two years to realise their macabre vision on vinyl. As exemplars of desired edginess, Sioux played incoming guitarist John McKay the Psycho and Omen soundtracks; he duly concocted a nerve-grating accompaniment to horror yarns of nervous breakdown (Suburban Relapse) and fracturing identity (Jigsaw Feeling; Overground). Alongside the contemporaneous Public Image single, post-punk started here.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

JOIN HANDS

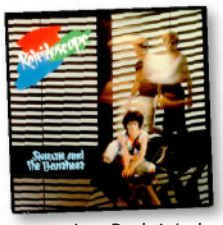
(Polydor, 1979)

Initially overshadowed by the group's release-day implosion and, subsequently, the ensuing trio of masterpieces, this second Banshees LP has aged well, its oppressive claustrophobia permeating deeper-and-darker excavations of Great War inhumanity (Regal Zone), religious fervour (Icon) and children's cruelty (Playground Twist). The 14-minute studio tilt at 100 Club debut 'cover' The Lord's Prayer thunders like a psychotic Neu!.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

KALEIDOSCOPE

(Polydor, 1980)

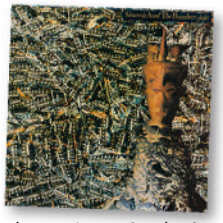


Triumph plucked from the jaws of defeat, as Sioux and Severin explored new directions, boldly deploying synth, beatbox, electric sitar and, on Red Light, camera-shutter percussion. Budgie's drumming brought a new propulsion, and their Hong Kong Garden pop sensibility shone on schizo paean Christine, and Happy House, where Magazine guitarist John McGeoch wove an exotically flanged future.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

JUJU

(Polydor, 1981)



With McGeoch successfully poached, the Banshees here entered their imperial period, cooking up a powerful pan-Eastern horrorcore full of unsettling witchy wonder, as a spicy alternative to Anglo-American blues-rock stodge. On top of the road-drilled new line-up's fearsome pummel on Spellbound, Halloween et al, Siouxsie was icily majestic, outstandingly frightening on Night Shift's Yorkshire Ripper interior monologue.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

A KISS IN THE DREAMHOUSE

(Polydor, 1982)

After *Juju*'s terrifying show of strength, … *Dreamhouse* reverted to *Kaleidoscope*'s more seductive experimentalism, with chimes, tubular bells, recorder, loops and orchestration bringing fresh texture for a modernised psychedelic sound. Sioux actually wrote Cocoon's womb-regression lyrics on LSD, while several other songs, including the dance-craze-satirising Slowdive, crackled with explicit erotic charge. Throughout: lurid, phantasmagoric, brilliant.

THE CREATURES

FEAST

(Polydor, 1983)

When Sioux and Budgie 'announced' their relationship via the making-love-in-a-hotel-shower sleeve for The Creatures' debut EP, everything went cuckoo in BansheeWorld. In a much-needed cooling-off period, the couple decamped to Hawaii to make *Feast* which, true to life, was a frazzled tropical holiday replete with jungle chatter, tribal percussion and, in Miss The Girl, a marimba-clonking hit.

THE GLOVE

BLUE SUNSHINE

(Wonderland/Polydor, 1983)

Concurrently, Steve Severin buddied up with The Cure's Robert Smith, twice the Banshees' supersub guitarist but himself enmired in acid mania post-*Pornography*. As The Glove, the pair further pursued the flat-out psychedelic pop of She's A Carnival off …*Dreamhouse*, with Top Of The Pops dancer Jeanette Landray mostly voicing since Smith was contractually barred.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

TINDERBOX

(Polydor, 1986)

After five ace albums in consecutive years, the Banshees faltered on the disappointing *Hyaena* (1984). For *Tinderbox*, Clock DVA's John Carruthers replaced Robert Smith, as producers including an overbearing Bob Ezrin (Alice Cooper etc) came and went. Protracted remixing salvaged a muscular *Juju*-esque feel for songs specifically about the band's inner turmoil (This Unrest). Pompeii bopalong Cities In Dust's US success clinched victory.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

PEEPSHOW

(Polydor, 1988)

Though intra-band workings remained fraught and methodology unformulaic, the group scored their ninth straight UK Top 20 studio album with *Peepshow*. Irresistible campaign-starter Peek-A-Boo typified Banshee deviance, its dancefloor lope constructed from backwards drums and brass, the jarring vocals captured via different-sounding microphones. After a fractious decade, Last Beat Of My Heart movingly reunited Sioux and Severin as co-writers.

THE CREATURES

HÁI!

(Sioux/Instinct, 2003)

As the Banshees expired, only fleetingly to reunite in '02, Sioux and Budgie, now settled in south-west France, focused on The Creatures. Fourth time out, 90 minutes of percussion were recorded in Tokyo with Kodo Drummers' Leonard Eto, then edited back home into Japan-marvelling ditties (see Godzilla!) and divvied into an 'extroverted' A-side and a beatifically 'calmer' flip.

ARBAN & STEVEN SEVERIN

BEAUTY & THE BEAST

(Subconscious Music, 2005)

Post-Banshees, Steve Severin became a prolific soundtrack composer for fringe movies and theatre. This short-run CD documented music for raunchy Indo-Japanese dancer Shakti's stage production of *Beauty & The Beast*. Under time constraints, Severin and his wife Arban composed half apiece, then swapped to complete each other's work – an efficiency which ever eluded the Banshees.

SIOUXSIE

MANTARAY

(W14/Universal, 2007)

Four years on from *Hái!*, Ms Sioux had divorced Budgie and finally flew solo, as *Mantaray* came together in Bath alongside sometime Robert Plant sessioneer/producers Steve Evans and Charlie Jones. Couching her iconic voice atop snazzy contemporary beats, it recalled Dame Shirley Bassey's work with Propellerheads. If It Doesn't Kill You, indeed, could've been a Bond theme.

Guido Harari

Fireworks display: (clockwise from left) Budgie and Siouxsie cool down after the shoot for The Creatures' Wild Things EP (inset); John McGeoch, Budgie and Severin, Modena, June 23, 1981; Budgie and Siouxsie at the 1987 Brit awards.

Adrian Boot/urbanimage.tv, PG Brunelli/iconicpix, Shutterstock

THE LAST BEAT

AND FINALLY: THE MAN WHO MAINTAINED THE BANSHEES' RHYTHMIC CHASSIS, AND A MARRIAGE TO THEIR IMPERIOUS DIVA, FOR SO LONG. BUDGIE SINGS LIKE A CANARY. MARTIN ASTON HARKS.

NOT JUST THE LONGEST-SURviving drummer in the Banshees' history but Siouxsie's lover (and husband) for almost 30 years, Peter 'Budgie' Clarke was closer to the eye of the storm than any other member. The couple divorced in 2007, since when Budgie has remarried and currently lives in Berlin. More recently, he's played with John Grant and recorded a forthcoming album (and an ongoing podcast) with Cure founder Lol Tolhurst. "I'm still here," he says. "That's what really matters."

Did you know that Siouxsie was returning to live performance?

I had no idea. The first I heard was that she was headlining the festival with Iggy in America. At first it was, "Let me check that out," and, "Ooh, what's the drummer doing?" I checked the setlist, and I think, apart from three songs, it could have come from 40 years ago, which surprised me because I realised this tour is heading for the big festivals, audiences who might know only one or two songs. But I think Siouxsie looks comfortable in herself: she doesn't have to do anything audiences expect, or not. It's not Siouxsie And The Banshees, though, it's just Siouxsie.

Do you wish that you still played Banshees songs live?

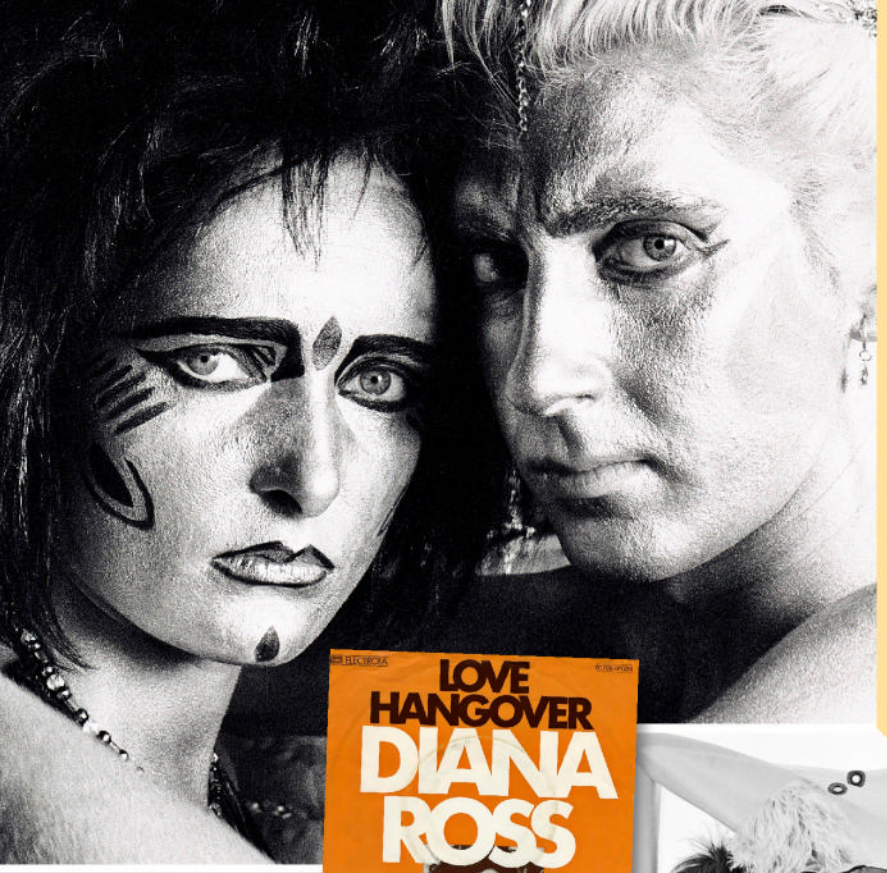
I don't know what I miss. If I watch myself playing with John [McGeoch], I see a ferocity, and a knowledge beyond our experience. That's not to disparage the longest-running line-up with Jon [Klein] and Martin [McCarrick] – the group grew in many different ways. But when John McGeoch was there… That adrenaline rush, played off against John's insouciance, he just swayed and jigged to himself and played these extraordinary arpeggios. But it's impossible to maintain that intensity, so you have to change. We keep changing guitarists, so everything has to change. To find another John.

Why were most of them called John?

(*Laughs*) I don't know. There were a couple of Robs along the way. John Carruthers [1984-87] said to me, "I'm not the best guitarist, why did you choose me?" Because we didn't like anyone else! We once asked Robert Fripp. He said, "I do like the band, I really like Siouxsie, she's marvellous." But he was busy.

Was Siouxsie the band's natural-born leader, or was it more of a democracy?

When I see interviews, say from MTV in 1984, Siouxsie isn't pushed to the front, she just is. She could take a shine to an interviewer, but she's guarded in the same moment. She is, or maybe was, a complex, complicated character, extremely fun and… tricky. She would just switch moment to moment, a question would lead her one way and she would flip it back, or disregard it. Her musical input was top-line melody, and even if the lyric was Severin's, it was Siouxsie's interpretation. If an idea came from the bass, drum or guitar, she would be a tastemaker for that suggestion and if it didn't suit, we'd move on. But when we did [standalone 1982 single] Fireworks on Top Of The Pops, the props department made a big flashing sign of 'Siouxsie' and she hated it as much as the boys did. But Siouxsie was the focal ➢



"SIOUXSIE IS, OR MAYBE WAS, A COMPLICATED CHARACTER, EXTREMELY FUN AND... TRICKY."
BUDGIE

Tangled up: (clockwise from top) Siouxsie and Budgie shooting the video for The Creatures' Right Now, 1983; the Banshees' power couple backstage in Sweden, June 1982; Siouxsie Sioux goes solo, March 21, 2008.

Steve Rapport, Jill Furmanovsky, Shutterstock

point, the tastemaker; in many ways, it was what she allowed, really. If there was humour to be had, and she was OK with it, that would be good. But she required 110 per cent devotion.

Siouxsie did have a somewhat formidable reputation – some might say terrifying.

I think of that Nottingham [Theatre Royal] gig [August 23, 1981], when we start Eve White/Eve Black: Siouxsie's sitting on the stage at the front, with this lost look and her voice is tiny, like a child in a well – which is the type of imagery she would give in the studio. She has a healthy dislike of sweetness, and yet she can play it. It's either an incredible skill or something that was already there, the ability to flip quickly through emotions and not just perform that split personality, but find it.

I knew her relaxed side too, Susan from Chislehurst, and her family. Her mum was the sweetest lady and yet there was a strange rivalry between her older sister, and mother, and her poor brother stuck in the middle! Perhaps some clue to what it was like being around Siouxsie… her favourite movie characters were Bette Davis and Joan Crawford: All About Eve, Mommie Dearest, Whatever Happened To Baby Jane? All these titles would regularly crop up as we were searching for a sound or a look, to get into the mood. But Placebo Effect's bass line was lifted from Diana Ross's Love Hangover. A good mash-up.

Going by the video for Kiss Them For Me [from *Superstition*, 1991], the Siouxsie image was softening. It felt like the Banshees were coming in from the cold. Was there a plan to be more accessible?

It wasn't the main driving force. Kiss Them For Me's lyric was about Jayne Mansfield, so the video was glamorous. Hong Kong Garden was a pop song to begin with, and it wasn't on *The Scream*. Neither was Fireworks on *[A Kiss In The] Dreamhouse*, or Dear Prudence on *Hyaena*. I wonder if principles got in the way. And yet, we felt, why weren't we invited to Live Aid? Not that we were Bananarama. We didn't make it easy to fit. Siouxsie could be the catalyst of that. Severin could be as funny or grumpy as he felt that day – he took the lead sometimes from Siouxsie, they could fire each other up to be more wilfully disruptive, or they could be thick as thieves. We did become more comfortable with the enduring line-up of the last few albums, starting with *Superstition*, I think, and Siouxsie did change her hair, to a bob cut; Anton [Corbijn] took some shots that we did our best to keep from the public eye! It was like, Siouxsie changes her hair, big deal! But she did embrace the feminine more around that time, a softer side came out and the music went with that. But we never had a group discussion about image, or the next step. It might have been better if we had.

Did Severin find it hard working with a couple?

He says not. Maybe that's what he would say. Otherwise, you would have left. If the band wasn't bigger than your personal feelings, then the slightest change in the terrain would throw you into Fleetwood Mac mode. How do you stick around when you're still very much in a working relationship with your ex-lover? Which is the reason Siouxsie and I didn't push our relationship into the foreground, even though we took photos that said everything… or were we acting? Siouxsie and Severin had split by early Banshees days. [Former Banshees manager] Nils [Stevenson] and Siouxsie had been partners too. And then I came along.

Did you meet John McKay and Kenny Morris?

I met them both. I'd seen the Banshees live a few times. I thought John had a commanding stage presence, and an amazing sound. Kenny was like a puppet, like someone was controlling his limbs from above – I'd never seen anything like it. He didn't drive the beat. Severin propelled it with eighth notes. And Siouxsie was just possessed, from the first time I saw her at Eric's in Liverpool, she just collapsed at the end. By the time I saw them in London, it was more theatrical. I met John some time later. Kenny turned up on my doorstep one day. He is a sweet guy but I don't think Kenny ever let go. He'd call me sometimes; he'd say, "I could come and play tambourine…" When The Creatures played Ireland, where Kenny lives, he came backstage, no unpleasantness at all.

How did Robert Smith change the Banshees?

He changed the way we were writing. It was like the band's mid-life crisis – where do we go next? When we recorded *Hyaena*, Robert almost refused to play guitar, only keyboards. We just went with it. But we wrote Swimming Horses and Take Me Back, on drums and piano. Then we had to get [cellist] Martin McCarrick in to help out. He was there to arrange strings but then he took over the role that Rob had introduced to the repertoire.

When all's said and done, how do you feel about the Banshees, post-punk Fleetwood Mac machinations and all?

The music did touch a lot of people. And the further you move around, you find out what your squabbles and fun times and ridiculous non-decisions meant to people outside who just saw the result. For me, it was all serendipity. I was in the right place when the first line-up folded, and I folded in, and stuck the course, because it was tricky, and fractious, and loving, and entangled… That's a good word for me and Siouxsie's relationship too. And I wouldn't change a thing.

Budgie and Lol Tolhurst's podcast Curious Creatures is at curiouscreaturespodcast.com

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JAMES McNAIR ROLLS WITH BLAKE MILLS. ALBUMS P85

CONTENTS

80 ALBUMS
- Blur: hand in hand through their midlife
- Rhiannon Giddens: she's the one
- Blake Mills: a true voyager on the *Jelly Road*
- Plus, the return of Sigur Rós, PiL, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Bettye LaVette, Soft Machine, Nils Lofgren, Janelle Monáe, Osees, The Hives, Bebel Gilberto and more.

94 REISSUES
- Blow your mind: newly discovered recording of John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy
- Neil Young's ragged, glorious early '90s
- Cult figure Tucker Zimmerman
- Plus, Brian May, Primal Scream, John Lee Hooker, Lewis Taylor, Sheila Chandra, Fela Kuti, Malcolm McLaren and more.

107 BOOKS
- The history of B-sides, new biographies of The Velvet Underground, The B-52's, Electric Wizard, Brit jazz colossus Gerry Mulligan and more.

108 SCREEN
- A top-notch TV history of the Montreux Jazz Festival. Plus, Chicago blues, Flowered Up, Ziggy the movie and more.

INDEX

Abbott, Fred 84
Belbury Poly 87
Ben Ali, Ahmed 97
Blur 80
Bokanté 86
Bonnie 'Prince' Billy 82
Bush Tetras 86
Chandra, Sheila 96
Co-Pilot 91
Coltrane, John & Dolphy, Eric 94
Cooper, Mike 97
Cut Worms 84
D'Addario, Ronnie 87
DeJohnette, Jack 99
Do Nascimento, Fabiano 84
Flaer 88
Fuchsia 98
Giddens, Rhiannon 83
Gilberto, Bebel 91
Girl Ray 91
Greta Van Fleet 88
Greig, Charlotte 96
Groves, Laura 84
Guided By Voices 82
High Pulp 89
Hinds, Wren 87
Hives, The 86
Hooker, John Lee 98
Hozier 91
Hung, Andrew 91
Imamović, Damir 87
Jones, Del 98
Josué, Érol 88
Joy 96
Jungle 86
Kane, Miles 88
Kessel, Barney 98
Kuti, Fela 96
LaVette, Bettye 86
Lee, Minhwi 98
Lightning Dust 84
Locks, Damon & Mazurek, Rob 89
Lofgren, Nils 86
Lowe, Nick 96
Mapache 89
May, Brian 99
McLaren, Malcolm 99
Me Lost Me 87
Meek, Buck 82
Mills, Blake 85
Mokoomba 89
Monáe, Janelle 89
Monet, Aja 88
Mystic Chords Of Memory 96
Night Beats 84
Nuclear Banana, The 83
Observer All Stars, The & King Tubbys 97
Ochoa, Eliades 82
Osees 88
Our Broken Garden 83
Potter, Sally 83
Primal Scream 99
Proby, P.J. 98
Public Image Ltd 82
Radin, Joshua 88
Scar, Belle 91
Sigur Rós 84
Soft Machine 86
St Louis, Anna 91
Susanna 89
Taylor, Lewis 98
Tony Williams Lifetime, The 96
VA: Field Recordings Of Mack McCormick 97
VA: Tell Everybody! 83
William The Conqueror 87
Young, Neil 97
Zimmerman, Tucker 99

To the end

Eight years after their last album, Britpop's golden boys hit that difficult stage. By Victoria Segal. Illustration by Borja Bonafuente Gonzalo.

Blur

★★★★

The Ballad Of Darren

PARLOPHONE. CD/DL/LP

"Blur give a lot of heart – historically not always their strongest suit, but abundant on *The Ballad Of Darren*."

INTERVIEWED AROUND the release of his second solo album, 2021's *The Nearer The Fountain, More Pure The Stream Flows*, Damon Albarn suggested that a Blur reunion would be "light relief" compared with the mournfully untethered songs that he was writing at the time. That, however, is not the impression created by *The Ballad Of Darren*, Blur's ninth album and their first since 2015's excellent but oddly peripatetic *The Magic Whip*.

While it vibrates with all sorts of echoes and aftershocks from the band's pop pomp – an "Oi!" here, a flash of brass there – these are not songs that suggest larks back aboard the mothership, the boys reunited for one more cheery jaunt. Instead, this is a record that understands nostalgia not as comforting singalong or trophy-lift of past glories, but a tangible pain that comes with cataloguing all the people, places and selves that are shed over the years. "I just looked into my life/And all I saw was that you're not coming back," sings Albarn on opening song The Ballad, a versatile line of grief and regret. The willowy Johnny Marr guitars of Barbaric, meanwhile, are tempered by Albarn bleakly repeating a tightly condensed little tragedy: "I have lost the feeling/That I thought I'd never lose." It feels fittingly adult for a band so many will have grown up with, like some real-time Britpop version of Richard Linklater's Boyhood. As Coxon tells MOJO, *The Ballad Of Darren* features songs that are "quite retrospective, looking back over a career, over friendships that have been long-term." We all go hand in hand through their midlife.

The album begins with a sudden clank, the sound of something cranking back into action, as if Blur have been in suspended animation, waiting for a coin in the slot. As their individual CVs make clear – not least Albarn's hugely successful stewardship of Gorillaz, guitarist Graham Coxon's solo and soundtrack work, drummer Dave Rowntree's political and legal work and bassist Alex James's cheesemaking – that's far from true, but the opening songs could not make it clearer that this is a Blur album. One of three tracks specifically rooted in the Super Trouper life of the working band, The Ballad can trace its roots back to The Universal or To The End, its Jim O'Rourke-does-Bacharach grandeur collapsed in melancholy. "I met you at an early show… we travelled around the world together," sings Coxon in response to Albarn, his backing vocals continuing a conversation that began more than four decades ago when the singer insulted his brogues in a Colchester school yard. Next, though, comes the clammy St Charles Square, the portrait in Song 2's attic, a syphilitic Girls And Boys, an account of a paranoid breakdown that expects you to know exactly who, where and what it's talking about ("Pauli's ghost come back to haunt me"). A sweet-heart contract between Magazine and The Soft Boys, it's the album's most raucous moment, a reminder of how gloriously messy Blur could always be.

Yet despite St Charles Square's exuberant mutations ("Tesco disco!") there is a coherence to *The Ballad Of Darren*, a sense that each song quietly connects to and reflects on the next. While *The Magic Whip*, conceived during ad hoc sessions in Hong Kong and almost shelved, used globalisation and international travel to suggest ennui, *The Ballad Of Darren* spins into a more mythical, mystical direction. Far Away Island seems to detail a long-distance relationship, but its haunted-piano waltz and siren-call vocals work for any desperate yearning; Avalon frets over a lost state of grace. First single The Narcissist, meanwhile, casts the performer as "Pierrot", the My Bloody Valentine distortion at the end suggesting a self being slowly obliterated by the distortions of fame, somebody struggling to find themselves in the fuzz. ("Picking your way through this strange life you've signed up for without knowing what exactly it was about or what was going to happen to you," says Coxon). It's elegant mythologising – not misty islands and "apple of Avalon" but Blur themselves.

The world outside does creep into *The Ballad Of Darren*. Avalon refers to "grey painted aeroplanes… on their way to war," while Russian Strings, hiding *Pornography*-level darkness behind wistful piano glides, burrows into geopolitical chaos with its collapsing buildings and implacable end-times forces: "So turn the music up/I'm hitting the hard stuff," sings Albarn, all ambiguity wrung from those last words. Yet there's a more personal sense of apocalypse at play here, too. While Avalon is happy to drop back into their early Kinks fetishism, the verses sink into the twilight decline of David Bowie's Where Are We Now?. "Then I overdo my dose and I don't even know I'm here any more," sings Albarn. "Just something that comes to us all."

What that might be is most powerfully evoked on closing song The Heights, a song that might have persuaded Philip Larkin to put down the jazz and investigate Blur's back catalogue. Using the language of star/fan power dynamics ("Standing in the back row/This one's for you") it hints at the ultimate leveller, a force that flattens out the difference between who is on-stage and who isn't – "something so bright out there that you can't even see it." It all ends in white noise, then sudden silence, an ambiguous Sopranos-like final curtain.

For all these disturbances, this grappling with the difficult stuff of life and death, there is a lovely, graceful ease to *The Ballad Of Darren*. This isn't the sound of a band trying to react against their past, or challenge their Britpop audience with US noise, or justify their existence – it's Blur simply showing what they do best. As Albarn sings on The Heights, they give a lot of heart – historically not always their strongest suit, but abundant here. There's no doubt that they are going through something, but if there is joy to be found on *The Ballad Of Darren*, it's that Blur, once again, are going through it together.

Kevin Westenberg

BACK STORY: SHOW YOUR WORKING

● Although *The Ballad Of Darren* was written rapidly at the start of the year, Graham Coxon says the songs were "quite slow to show themselves in a lot of ways". Working with guide vocals early on, he had to "almost pre-empt what the lyrics are going to be… Like, Far Away Island I really wanted to be a little bit woozy and a bit seafaring." There's also "a lot of beautiful harmonic content on the record because I think Damon wrote lots of it on the piano." Then, of course, there was three days of solid singing backing vocals. "That was right at the end, when I started to realise, Yeah, there are two or three of these songs that I think people are really going to like."

GRAHAM SPEAKS! COXON ON SOUNDING LIKE MEN AND BEING SILLY IN THE STUDIO

BRITISH
IMAGE 55

Graham Coxon: "we had to laugh and be silly in the studio because it was intense."

"It sounds like Blur; but more like men."

Graham Coxon speaks to Victoria Segal.

Blur initially reassembled to prepare for this year's live shows – was an album always on the cards?

"I did feel a little bit awkward about doing live shows without anything new to play. But then Damon said, 'Well, I have been making some demos on my travels' and I thought, Yeah, an EP or something, something new to play when we go out and about – but then it seemed there was more and more. He was writing early in the year as well and that was added to the pile – songs he'd been writing while touring with Gorillaz. Then it was, 'Well, it's January now – when can we start recording, how can we finish this before these shows?' It was quite a hurry. We called James [Ford, producer] and he was up for it, and we just got in the studio as soon as we could."

Was there one "eureka!" song where you knew it was coalescing into an album?

"They were all, for me, very hard. They took a lot of thinking and a lot of playing – an awful lot. Just to find my place and carve out the identity of the songs. But St Charles Square – that's a bit of a stomper. When I got that one going – this weird tune on the guitar, the slapback echo, maybe I thought about Scary Monsters a little bit – that seemed to work immediately. It kind of starts with a bit of a Parklife 'Oi!', doesn't it? Because the record does look back over our career and our friendships, I did try to tackle some guitar sounds that I haven't really looked at for a long time. Especially Goodbye Albert – that I would relate back to songs like Peach and Bone Bag [1993's For Tomorrow B-sides] that I think are some of Blur's finest moments, when we were finding our way out of baggy to a place we felt was our own."

Alex [James, bassist] said you still surprise each other. Did you feel surprised?

"Not surprised, relieved. Relieved we were capable of these songs, that Damon could write these songs – he doesn't always have to write songs like this, but it makes my job a lot better when he does write songs like this, songs I can really get inside of and expand on. It might not be noticeable, but it wasn't easy by any stretch of the imagination to make the record. We did have a time limit, so we had to work really fast and it was very intense. Finishing the backing vocals, that was the first time I realised it was sounding really good. I think when Damon put his vocals on, and I put my backing vocals on – that's what makes Blur Blur. Suddenly, it's like, 'Woah, it sounds like Blur'. But sort of more like men."

Men?

"(*Laughs*) I think the voices are deeper, maybe richer. There's a strange vulnerability, but there's sort of a strength. It's an interesting thing to be a part of. But extremely positive. I thought we were getting on great – there was lots of laughing in the studio, lots of being silly. We had to laugh and be silly because it was intense. You've got to have times when you're just being an idiot."

Public Image Ltd

★★★★

End Of World

PIL OFFICIAL/CARGO. CD/DL/LP

Recently bereaved John Lydon breaks eight-year recorded silence.

In January, three months before his beloved Nora Forster's death, Lydon unleashed Hawaii, both a wonderfully beatific thanksgiving for their life together, and a twangily auspicious taster for PiL's eleventh long-player. Just as Hawaii is gently touching where 1979's eulogy for Lydon's mother, Death Disco, was painfully jagged, stylistically much of *End Of World* will seem shockingly traditional to those fans who always wanted JL to reconvene the late-'70s Wobble-Levene line-up. It is, however, an undeniably enjoyable career-twilight collection. The title track thrillingly revisits the heavy rock of 1986's *Album*, with guitarist Lu Edmonds slashing out inventively spidery riffs, while Car Chase and the student-pillorying Being Stupid Again reignite Open Up's dancefloor furore. Thereafter prevails a spacious reggae/disco groove reminiscent of mid-'80s Compass Point (think Robert Palmer, Ian Dury) – hardly 'changing music' again, but Johnny Boy's in fine agitational voice, lambasting suburbanites (Penge) and "liars, fakes, cheats and farts" (LFCF), and making passionate tunes within known frontiers.

Andrew Perry

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy

★★★★

Keeping Secrets Will Destroy You

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

Twelve new songs recorded in hometown Louisville, Kentucky with a handful of locals.

It's been 30 years since Will Oldham released his first album under another alias, Palace Brothers. It was original, beautiful and more than a little unhinged – words that also apply to *Keeping Secrets*… This follow-up to his 2019 album *I Made A Place* – though in-between there were those collaborative albums with Matt Sweeney and Bill Callahan – has a spare, homespun feel with its simple folk guitar. On opener Like It Or Not, he'd sound like some old country singer if it weren't for the idiosyncratic lyrics. Elsewhere, local musicians casually drift in and out as if they just dropped by – sax, synth, a small chamber group (lovely on Blood Of The Wine), as well as backing singer Dane Waters. Highlights include first single Bananas, a slow dreamy ballad, and the arboreal duo Willow, Pine And Oak and doomy Trees Of Hell.

Sylvie Simmons

Guided By Voices

★★★★

Welshpool Frillies

GBV INC. CD/DL/LP

Second LP this year from the indie-rock institution.

"Scarcity value" is an alien concept to Robert Pollard, who celebrates the 40th anniversary of his Guided By Voices as he celebrates pretty much every year: with an avalanche of releases. His prolificity suggests he's writing songs in his sleep, and some Pollard releases have certainly sounded like it. But *Welshpool Frillies* maintains the high standard of GBV since he reunited them six years (and 15 albums) ago, shoving The Who through the post-punk mangle on Rust Belt Boogie and delivering sublime heartbreak on Don't Blow Your Dream Job. As ever, there's a nagging suspicion Pollard's gift might be better served by distilling the best of a year's output into a single volume. But the man hears "accidental harmonies/ Coming from the slot machines", and *Welshpool Frillies*' wonky anthems and rustic pop gems argue we should be grateful he's sharing them all.

Stevie Chick

Eliades Ochoa

★★★★

Guajiro

WORLD CIRCUIT. CD/DL/LP

Personal songs from the Buena Vista Social Club star; guests include Joan Wasser.

Hailed as Cuba's answer to Johnny Cash – mostly due to his penchant for all-black, cowboy-style attire – 76-year-old Ochoa rose to fame in the late-'90s as a member of Buena Vista Social Club, the Havana-based aggregation that made the wider world fall in love with Cuban music. Taking its title from his country's term for country-dwelling people, Ochoa's new record is his most deeply personal yet, exploring autobiographical themes across 11 tracks that are solidly entrenched in the traditional Cuban music style: son. Accompanying his plaintive voice with deft filigrees of nylon-stringed guitar, Ochoa is joined by Joan As Police Woman on the smouldering ballad Creo En La Naturaleza, and Charlie Musselwhite, who blows some howling harmonica riffs on the bluesy West. There's also a cameo by Rubén Blades on the lively Pajarito Voló, but Ochoa remains the undoubted star of the show.

Charles Waring

Buck Meek

★★★★

Haunted Mountain

4AD. CD/DL/LP

Big Thief co-founder's third solo album hits artistic peak.

Following two albums of low-key, lo-fi cowboy-folk albums, Big Thief guitarist Buck Meek finally lets rip. Away from the framework of Big Thief partner Adrianne Lenker's songs, Meek's own music tends to wander into whimsical love territory, his aversion to break-up songs making them wonderfully upbeat, whether addressed directly or through natural world metaphors of mountains, rivers and raindrops. With his backing band expanded to a five-piece, and now produced by his long-term solo partner Mat Davidson (AKA Twain), the low-down dirty, screeching guitars mix with Meek's affecting, vulnerable, Emo Philips-meets-Neil Young voice, making tracks such as Cyclades and the title track sound like an indie Crazy Horse. With half the album co-written by former Be Good Tanya Jolie Holland, the songs are wonderfully non-toxic, obsessed in only the best possible way, a refreshing take on country love and lust.

Andy Fyfe

Man in black: Eliades Ochoa tips his hat to son cubano.

Kevin Westenberg, Massimiliano Giorgeschi

All heart

The multidisciplinary powerhouse brings a big band to her first set of originals. By Grayson Haver Currin.

Rhiannon Giddens: too powerful to fit the LP's humble scale.

Rhiannon Giddens

★★★

You're The One

NONESUCH. CD/DL/LP

FEW AMERICAN performers this century are more accomplished and important than Rhiannon Giddens. Two decades ago, the conservatory-trained opera singer pulled back the closely guarded shades on the historical importance of African-Americans in her country's string-band tradition via the riveting Carolina Chocolate Drops. Her career has since spun in a dozen different directions, from Pulitzer-winning opera composer to Grammy-winning folk interpreter, from joyous television host to children's book author. Her work typically upends racist power structures to reveal the purposefully obscured accomplishments of black forebears or how their work built the foundation of American wealth. Giddens applies a ravenous mind and unwavering gumption to whatever storytelling medium avails itself.

But the solo album has remained a foible of sorts. She made two in short order during the middle of the last decade. The first was an intriguing collection of folk-and-country interpretations buttressed by T Bone Burnett and company, while the second's uneven assortment of originals and covers flowed from that same tradition. There were flashes of brilliance, but there was the disorienting sense that Giddens was perhaps too powerful for the form, her high-concept mind struggling to fit the LP's humble scale. Despite moments of complete charm, wit, and beauty, *You're The One* – her first solo LP in six years and her first set of her own songs – encounters the same existential obstacle. Can Giddens find space inside a seemingly simple song?

There's nothing fancy about the idea of *You're The One*. Its dozen tunes about finding love, rejecting losers, and criticising corrupt systems are a patchwork of assorted American pops: the swaying soul of Wrong Kind Of Right, the slinking funk-and-scat of Hen In The Foxhouse, the bounding piano sass of Too Little, Too Late, Too Bad. Recorded over six days in late-2022 by R&B mainstay Jack Splash at Miami's legendary Criteria, they're expertly played by a sharp band built to match Giddens's versatility. They drift like sleep itself during the lovesick Who Are You Dreaming Of and clench like a fist during the anti-carceral Another Wasted Life.

The hand, though, never quite fits the glove. With some exceptions, like a hopeful duet with Jason Isbell, Giddens and the crew function at different frequencies, never settling into a simpatico groove. Is it she or they that are so stiff, as if all responding to charts they've never played in the same room in real time? Either way, the effect can be tiring.

Giddens is an incisive writer, able to expose the root of a problem or the bloom of joy with a few well-laid rhymes. There are real laugh-out-loud moments here, like If You Don't Know How Sweet It Is, and brilliant romantic testimonials, like the title track. But that is all crowded by the abiding sense that Giddens parachuted into the studio during a pre-holiday lull in her more ambitious work to sing over a band rather than with them. At least she has plenty else to keep her busy.

The Nuclear Banana

★★★

Riot On Kansas City Strip

CD BABY. CD/LP

Era-evoking debut from garage-punk supergroup drawn from The Standells/ The Fuzztones/Vanilla Fudge ranks.

In 2015, guitarist/singer Joey Skidmore of the Joey Skidmore Band set up Skid-O-Rama, the now annual garage festival in Kansas City. In the same DIY spirit, he also put together The Nuclear Banana, a touring supergroup featuring vocalist/guitarist Tony Valentino of The Standells plus members of The Fuzztones, The Del-Lords and Vanilla Fudge. This eight-track debut album is split half and half between covers and originals. Versions of The Standells' Sometimes Good Guys Don't Wear White and Medication, Barry McGuire's Eve Of Destruction and the Stones' Tell Me are all one-two punches with fuzz, reverb, feedback and drone as and when required. The rest, written by Skidmore and Valentino, are in the same untamed, proto-punk style, peaking with You're Worth The Risk.

Lois Wilson

Various

★★★★

Tell Everybody!

EASY EYE SOUND. CD/DL/LP

"21st-century juke-joint blues," curated by Dan Auerbach's label.

Since its inauguration in 2017, Easy Eye has majored in salvaging bluesmen across the generations from cultural obscurity; this excellent sampler offers a timely summary of that enterprise. Though there's a corker apiece drawn from recent albums by veterans Jimmy 'Duck' Holmes (a simmering Catfish Blues) and Leo Bud Welch (the tranced-out Don't Let The Devil Ride), the majority of inclusions are otherwise unreleased. In line with Dan Auerbach's obsession with the Mississippi hill country sound explored on The Black Keys' *Delta Kream* record from 2021, there's a spooky Coal Black Mattie by surviving practitioner RL Boyce, while the title track finds in-house Louisiana soulman Robert Finley mesmerisingly backed by the late Junior Kimbrough's ensemble. Bossman Dan chips in the raunchy Every Chance I Get (I Want You In The Flesh) and a robust Black Keys outtake, and, even younger, Kentucky's Korean-American Nat Myers wows on the foot-stamping Willow Witchin'. All told: here's the blues, raw'n'alive.

Andrew Perry

Sally Potter

★★★

Pink Bikini

ISRC. DL

Orlando director's debut studio album.

Seventy-three is quite the age to release a debut album, but Sally Potter – sister of Van der Graaf Generator/ Misunderstood bassist Nic Potter – has a track record. The director of Orlando and the Johnny Depp vehicle The Man Who Cried has long contributed to her soundtracks – she even sang on The Tango Lesson – and she dabbled in improvised music in the 1970s. Recorded with Henry Cow's Fred Frith, it's an autobiographical and, yes, filmic affair which mostly recalls her radical youth ("I am," she notes on the schoolgirl reminiscence Black & White Badge, "a Ban The Bomb girl") but concludes with the liberated pensioner's perspective of Dance Girl Dance. The spartan structure makes for an intimate if one-paced experience and Potter's singing is more spoken in a Marianne Faithfull style, with a hint of Weimar, but she's a beguiling storyteller.

John Aizlewood

Our Broken Garden

★★★★

Blind

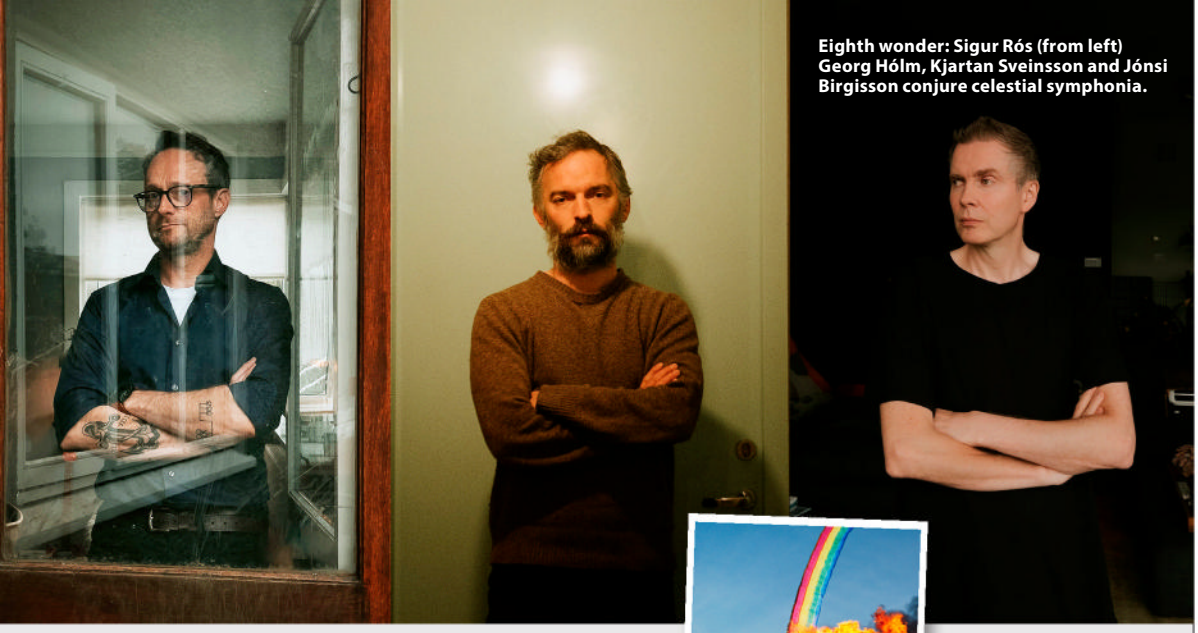
BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Welcome but belated third album from ethereal Dane – with a John Grant cameo.

The last album from glass-voiced former Efterklang keyboard player Anna Brønsted – who records as Our Broken Garden – was released in 2010. *Blind* has taken a long time to arrive. During the intervening period, Brønsted experienced a series of medical crises causing her to withdraw from frontline musical activities. The comeback has been faltering though. Not least as, contrary to diagnoses, she gave birth in 2020: what has become *Blind* was started in 2018. Considering its history, *Blind* is unexpectedly weightless. While Shameless, Words and Crown nod back to the gauzy Mazzy Star-filtered-through Red House Painters feel of before, a jazzy spring drives Waltz. Optimistic fanfares punctuate Sirens. Guest appearances by John Grant and Luke Temple on a track apiece confirm Brønsted is once again embracing the musical community. Hopefully, this lovely album means she's back to stay.

Kieron Tyler

Ebru Yildiz



Eighth wonder: Sigur Rós (from left) Georg Hólm, Kjartan Sveinsson and Jónsi Birgisson conjure celestial symphonia.

Sigur Rós

★★★★

Átta

KRUNK. CD/DL/LP

The panoramic Icelandic post-rockers' belated eighth album.

NOWADAYS A trio – singer Jónsi Birgisson, bassist Georg Hólm and multi-instrumentalist Kjartan Sveinsson – Sigur Rós's first studio album in a decade actually involves a cast of dozens, its 10 immersive tracks swept along on the London Contemporary Orchestra's waves of swelling, soaring strings, the widescreen arrangements decorated by Birgisson's distinctively empyrean vocalisations. Indeed, with lyrics delivered in characteristically liminal 'Hopelandish' and rock dynamics largely eschewed in favour of beatless ambience, voluminous, reverb-soaked tracks like Skel and Klettur find the singer in hymnal excelsis, his signature falsetto carving out a kind of emotional calligraphy, effectively the aching lead instrument in a celestial symphonia. At times, the tracks seem almost overburdened with poignancy – typically, the tectonic major to minor chordal shifts of Gold push Birgisson's ululations into ever more heartrending melodic shapes – and everywhere a kind of voluptuous awestruck sublimity pervades.

David Sheppard

Fabiano Do Nascimento

★★★

Das Nuvens

LEAVING. DL/LP/MC

Inventive Brazilian guitarist's freeform seventh LP flirts with electronica and modern jazz.

Fabiano Do Nascimento is spoiling us. 2023's second album arrives mere months after *Lendas* – an orchestral collaboration with Vittor Santos, with a side order of Arthur Verocai – but couldn't contrast more, the multi-string Brazilian guitarist forsaking regular percussionist Ricardo 'Tiki' Pasillas for minimalist home recordings with a drum machine. There's an electronic sensibility to the insistent Pontas (his most outwardly groove-oriented affair) and a floaty transcendence to the jazzy Das Nuvens, while the tinkling Aurora is as contemplative as the dawn it describes. Elsewhere, Nascimento trademarks – fleet yet tender fingerpicking, extensive use of harmonics – are all in place, anchoring Babel's electronically enhanced enigma and Thrdwrld's more spectral conjuring. Fellow guitarist Daniel Santiago's subtle shadings add understated warmth to Nascimento's ever-elegant melodies and mesmerising grasp of melancholia.

Andy Cowan

Tim Dunk

Lightning Dust

★★★★

Nostalgia Killer

WESTERN VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Together and apart: former Black Mountain duo redefine their relationship.

It's always tricky when couples split, especially when they're a band as well as an item. Amber Webber and Joshua Wells parted in 2019, but, bravely all things considered, chose to keep Lightning Dust afloat. Four possibly tricky years later, the Canadian duo, once of Black Mountain, have re-surfaced with the thoughtful, inventive but separately recorded *Nostalgia Killer*. It's a ruminative affair where the inventive Shadow Of Verona has a touch of Enya, Only You channels The Go-Go's and Fallen New is underpinned by Erik Satie-style piano. Webber sounds on the edge on I Do, but for the most part her vocals are pushed back in the mix by Wells's production, so there's the space for a ferocious instrumental coda to Rapids & Rivers. How long this is sustainable remains to be seen. Musically at least, though, they're doing just fine.

John Aizlewood

Fred Abbott & The Wild Unknown

★★★

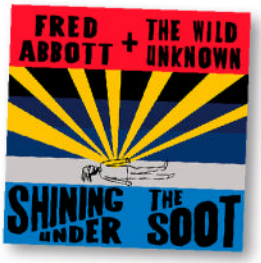
Shining Under The Soot

LOJINX. CD/DL/LP

Former Noah And The Whale guitarist and friends.

Twickenham indie rock stars Noah And The Whale weren't exactly known for their Midwest rock shapes, but guitarist Fred Abbott's 2015 solo debut *Serious Poke* showed he'd long been hiding just such a light. His second album continues the same Tom Petty/Bruce Springsteen classic moves, songs brimming with girls, cars, high school romance, girls, cars and busting out dreams. Abbott may not have experienced the same blue-collar trials as Springsteen's characters, but he makes a pretty convincing case, particularly on tracks such as What Kind Of Trouble and One More Roll Of The Dice – basically The Cars performing Jessie's Girl – or the more circumspect The Way Out Is Through The Door. Roping in guest vocalists such as his Orphan Colours cohorts Steve Llewellyn and Dave Burn, Abbott luckily avoids falling into a yawning yacht rock deathtrap by gunning for pure '70s FM radio thrills all the way.

Andy Fyfe



Cut Worms

★★★

Cut Worms

JAGJAGUWAR. CD/DL/LP

Brooklyn songsmith completes his sonic pruning.

Since Max Clarke's Byrdsily jangling 2018 debut *Hollow Ground*, the Ohio-born one-man ensemble has been pursuing what he terms 'pop essentialism': for 2020's *Nobody Lives Here Anymore* double LP, this entailed stripping down to bare, country-tinged fundaments at Sam Phillips Recording Studio in Memphis. The paring-down process continues on *Cut Worms*, its self-title implying Clarke's arrival at his intended destination. At best, Don't Fade Out opens with an effortless, Carole King-style blue-eyed soul swing, about keeping the romantic flame alive. This and the subtly orchestrated Living Inside were aptly recorded with The Lemon Twigs' D'Addario brothers, while Ballad Of The Texas King, one of a handful cut separately in the Catskills, forges sprightly country-rock with mournful licks of pedal steel. Over time, however, it can feel like Clarke has excised the excitement along with the extraneous matter, his balefully lovelorn tenor, now right out front without distracting clutter, often too reedy to carry the show.

Andrew Perry

Night Beats

★★★★

Rajan

FUZZ CLUB. CD/DL/LP

Texan psych voyager more fully embraces soul music.

It's been quite a trip for Danny Lee 'Night Beats' Blackwell. It wasn't until his fourth album, *Myth Of A Man*, that he started to embellish his hard, garage-rocking version of psychedelia with tinges of R&B and soul, aided by producer Dan Auerbach; and after all, Night Beats had been named after a Sam Cooke album. But whilst its two predecessors mostly hedged their fuzzy bets, *Rajan* fully commits, in the direction of The Isleys and Prince's frazzling heat, Blackwell's melting guitar solos soaring skywards. Within this, Blackwell remains an inveterate magpie of all things psychedelic; Hot Ghee and Osaka respectively incorporate Turkish psych and Tropicália, Motion Picture adapts the '60s pop model (hints of Tommy James's Crystal Blue Persuasion) and Morocco Blues even turns signature '50s rock'n'roll into another kaleidoscopic ride.

Martin Aston

Laura Groves

★★★★

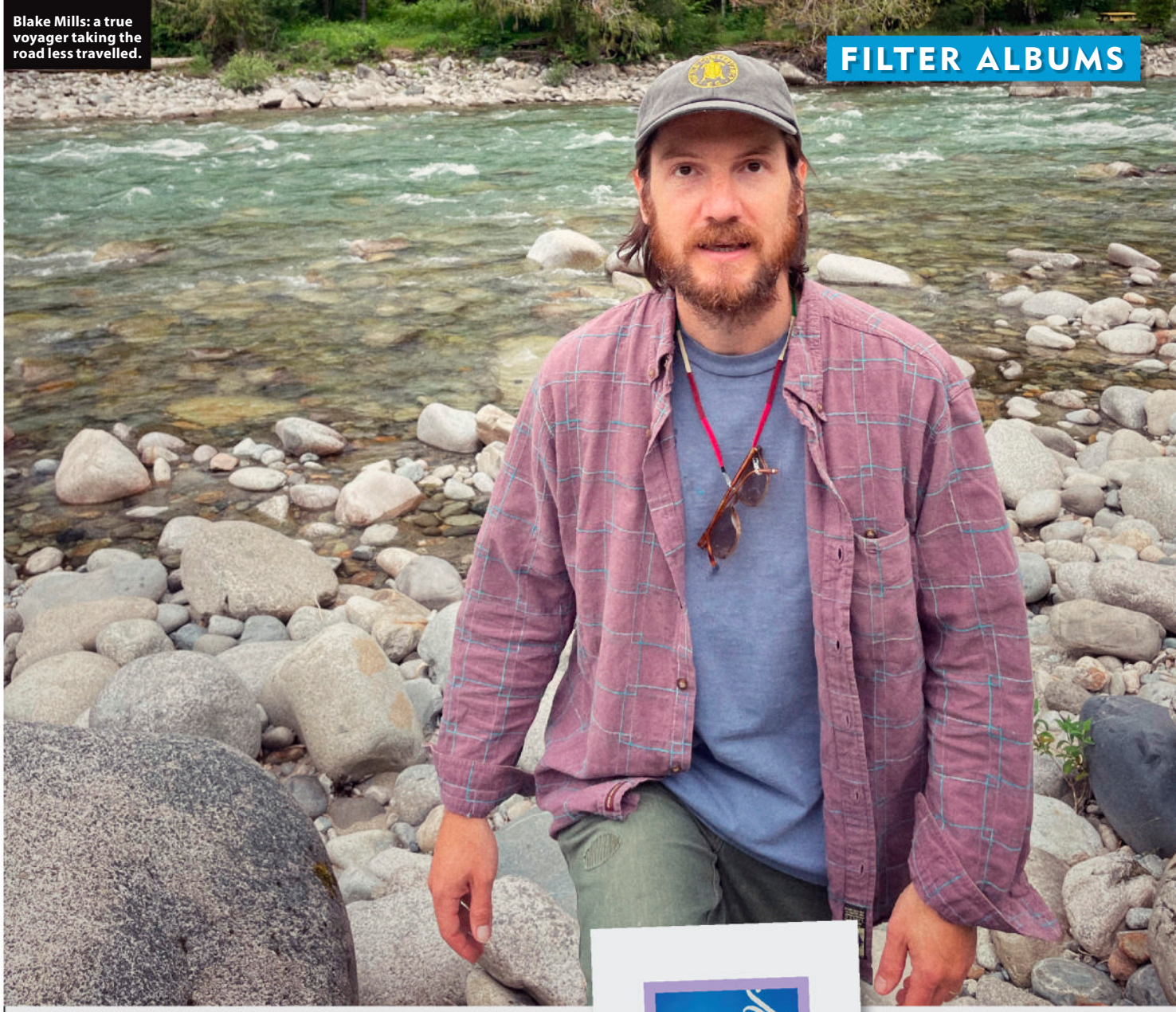
Radio Red

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Yorkshire singer-songwriter finds her own frequency.

On Sky At Night, the starstruck opening track of *Radio Red*, Laura Groves sounds like she's in a self-contained observatory, looking out into the cosmos and trying to pick up the right emotional signals – "getting you on my wavelength," as she sings dreamily. With the touch-sensitive, jazz-edged balladry of I'm Not Crying and Sarah, it doesn't initially seem too hard to tune into where Groves (formerly known as Blue Roses) is transmitting from, but if the buttons marked 'Kate Bush' and 'Joni Mitchell' are worn smooth, *Radio Red* has a free-floating lushness that generates its own little whirl of stardust. There's a touch of *Cupid & Psyche 85* glimmer to Make A Start and Good Intention (featuring Sampha); Any Day Now carries a lot of tension in its keyboards. Expansive, restless, subtly volatile, *Radio Red* is intriguing enough to keep it locked.

Victoria Segal



Blake Mills: a true voyager taking the road less travelled.

Jam today

In which the in-demand producer/guitarist collaborates with cult songwriter Chris Weisman. "We let ourselves dream," they say. By James McNair.

Blake Mills

★★★★

Jelly Road

NEW DEAL/VERVE. CD/DL/LP

WHEN RECRUITERS sought a chief songwriter/musical director for Daisy Jones & The Six, Amazon Prime's '70s LA-set portrayal of a fictional, Fleetwood Mac-like rock band, Blake Mills was a logical, yet slightly surprising choice. Surprising, since this Santa Monica-raised solo artist, guitar stylist and producer wasn't born until 1986, and logical because he really knows his shit. A great modern texturalist with a deep, yet intuitive understanding of roots music and more experimental forms, Mills has recorded with the likes of Bob Dylan, Lana Del Rey and Leslie Feist, and recently sat in with Joni Mitchell at the Gorge Amphitheatre, Washington.

Everybody, it seems, wants his input.

On *Jelly Road*, Mills's co-writer is the Brattleboro, Vermont-based songwriter and conceptual artist Chris Weisman. A cult figure and self-proclaimed "Transcendentalist hippy-type" cleaving to off-kilter strategies, Weisman is the author of a book entitled Nonmusical Patterns And Their Musical Uses, and was very much off-radar until Mills invited him to work on the Daisy Jones project.

Experimental yet accessible, *Jelly Road* is no mainstream drama gig, however. Making exquisite use of contrabass recorder, sustained guitar and Fender Rhodes, it eschews stricture and convention, Mills seemingly re-booting after an intense period of writing to brief. "There are no constellations, no narratives to navigate here," he and Weisman have said, accurately.

Though intoxicating melodies offer easy handholds, we are largely cast adrift in a deeply sensual, percussion-rich work. "Speak to me in breadcrumbs/Speak to me in code," sings Weisman on the modulating, jazz-Americana title track. Elsewhere, it's telling that on the Prince-like ballad Unsingable, replete with finger-cymbal, Mills's exotic vocal melody pilots a short treatise on compositional aesthetics: "What can make a song unsingable?/What can make a song feel lost?/What can make it inconceivable?/To play for any cost?"

Mentioning Prince is also apposite here since Prince & The Revolution's Wendy Melvoin is credited with "prepared electric guitar" on the resonant brass-imbued Highway Bright, and lends her name to Wendy Melvoin, a harmonically-bendy instrumental that's broadly reminiscent of the meditative, road-less-travelled sensibility she and Lisa Coleman brought to Prince's Sometimes It Snows In April.

With other parts of *Jelly Road* giving The Band's folk-rusticity an impressionistic twist, Mills's latest confirms his status as a true voyager. Seeking out Chris Weisman has proved particularly fruitful, since much of the magic here stems from the marriage of Mills's sculpted sonics and Weisman's ongoing war against melodic and lyrical cliché. Quite what these songs are about, though, is anybody's guess. Only A Fez, detailing a man's desire to be buried in the said headgear, seems clear.

The Hives

★★★

The Death Of Randy Fitzsimmons

FUGA. CD/DL/LP

Garage-pop Swedes' first album in a decade.

Here re-animating the "perpetual teenager" of rock'n'roll, The Hives have long understood the worth of self-mythology and mirth. Album number six is named for the demise of their mysterious founder and songwriting benefactor Randy Fitzsimmons, who has of course guided their return via a demo tape of these songs recently unearthed by his tombstone. The short, explosive tunes are as big as the fibs, opening riff-fest Bogus Operandi impressively ardent, and Countdown To Shutdown dripping with that drilled commitment to the cause that only The Hives, Rocket From The Crypt, the MC5 and select others can muster. Over 12 mostly blueprint-hugging songs returns diminish, but scuzzy beat-box disco outrider What Did I Ever Do To You is great, and packs the fabulous couplet, "Maybe it doesn't fit/ But at least it's a shoe."

James McNair

Soft Machine

★★★★

Other Doors

DYAD. CD/DL

John Etheridge and team keep the 55-year-old band/ brand alive.

The great jazz-rock drummer Bill Bruford bowed out at 60, wary of seeing his chops decline. On the new Soft Machine album, it's heartening to hear a great jazz-rock drummer giving his all at the age of 81. *Other Doors* may be John Marshall's last sortie with the umpteenth Soft Machine line-up but he propels the quartet with precision muscularity. The soundworld will be familiar from two previous Etheridge-led releases – ranging from Theo Travis's flutescapes and electronica to crunching, angular guitar-saxophone riffs. In-between there's a good deal of surprisingly mellow and reflective new music, plus a couple of repurposed old Softs tunes. Etheridge's guitar mastery is always a delight – he sounds like a more melodic Zappa – and Fred 'Thelonious' Baker's fretless bass adds new colours. Once a byword for avant-garde weirdery, this Soft Machine doesn't frazzle heads but paints in more delicate shades.

John Bungey

Bush Tetras

★★★

They Live In My Head

WHARF CAT. CD/DL/LP

No Wave veterans return with first new LP in 25 years.

The itchy punk-funk of their early singles is history, but Bush Tetras' fire remains undimmed on their first new album in a quarter of a century. Begun with late drummer Dee Pop, who passed away in 2021, the LP debuts a new rhythm section: Sonic Youth sticksman Steve Shelley and Pogues bassist Cait O'Riordan. The focus, however, is on the group's enduring founders. Cynthia Sley's snarl is withering on 2020 Vision's account of a plagued year, the eye of Walking Out The Door's fierce hurricane, and disdainful on the merciless So Strange. Pat Place's guitar, meanwhile, is a revelation, the ex-Contortion employing distortion, delay and artful abuse to sculpt noise that keeps these songs' grungy twists on blues and punk electrified. Alongside Live Skull's recent scourging reunion album, the revivified Bush Tetras prove No Wave's not dead.

Stevie Chick

Bokanté

★★★★

History

REAL WORLD. CD/DL/LP

A pan-continental blues odyssey.

A band with members in five countries and four continents was always going to suffer during lockdown but, five years on from their second album, bandleader and Snarky Puppy Michael League has reconvened the old gang for a brisk run through the history of the blues, tracing lines from the Arab world, through Africa and into the West. Opener Bliss comes with a sweeping bass line, North African maracas, and stinging lead guitar; most tunes come with a none-heavier guimbre or bass ngoni; on seductively layered vocals, Malika Tirolien switches neatly between English and Creole. The focus, however, is on the rhythms they pick up on their travels – unsurprising, really, when your band has four drummers; pure West African tradition in feel, it's here you can hear the many roads the blues would take when shipped abroad, from Led Zeppelin to Prince.

David Hutcheon

Jungle

★★★★

Volcano

CAIOLA. CD/DL/LP

Get swept away by the Shepherd's Bush duo's pyroclastic flow.

Jungle's fourth album continues their unique exploration of nu-disco; 14 three-minute or so bursts of funk and soul with superbly selected guests and samples. The duo – Josh Lloyd-Watson and Tom McFarland – have managed to grow from their feted Mercury-nominated eponymous debut in 2014 to quietly become a global concern; hugely popular in America and Europe, their sweet, slick fusion has both heart and bite. It is clear proof of what happens growing up listening to Daft Punk and Basement Jaxx. Working with Essex multi-instrumentalist Lydia Kitto and some of their usual supporting cast, *Volcano* continues where 2021's *Loving In Stereo* left off. Roots Manuva provides a stand-out contribution on You Ain't No Celebrity, and Channel Tres's turn on I've Been In Love is memorable, while the Latin shuffle of Every Night should enliven even the most jaded palette.

Daryl Easlea

Nils Lofgren

★★★

Mountains

CATTLE TRACK ROAD. CD/DL/LP

Solo album featuring old friends including Neil Young, David Crosby and Ringo Starr.

Nils Lofgren was stuck at home in Scottsdale, Arizona when he wrote and recorded these 10 rockers and ballads with themes of truth and love: nine are new originals and there's also the Bruce Springsteen cover, Back In Your Arms. Opener Ain't The Truth Enough starts *Mountains* off on a high note, catchy mid-tempo rock with great guitar, fine vocals and Ringo Starr on drums. It has an instant familiarity. So does the next track, Only Ticket Out, with its late–'70s California-rock-with-a-dash-of-drama feel. The first half of the album has two more highlights: Won't Cry No More, a guitar-heavy uptempo blues dedicated to Charlie Watts, and a ballad, Nothing's Easy, featuring Neil Young on vocals and quoting a line from *Tonight's The Night*'s Tired Eyes. Lofgren played on that album; he and his guests have history, but the second half of *Mountains* might have benefited from fewer backing singers – however good, they over-egg the songs.

Sylvie Simmons

Bettye LaVette

★★★★

LaVette!

JAY-VEE. CD/DL/LP

Veteran deep soul powerhouse gives her all to a connoisseur's songsmith.

CUTTING HER debut 45 in 1962 and first masterpiece, the deep soul classic Let Me Down Easy, in 1965, Michigan-born LaVette (née Betty Jo Haskins) is enjoying a sensational 21st century of barnstorming albums. Gut-wrenching but wry, bloody but unbowed, she wrings everything into and out of a song. Dylan, Beatles, Stones and even Who, Floyd and Zep tunes have been blisteringly Bettyed, and now she's delved into the undersung songbook of Randall Bramblett, of Stones keyboardist Chuck Leavell's old band Sea Level and also solo since 1975. It's a perfect fit, his smart but heartfelt compositions finding the ideal voice to do full justice to their quality. They range from the flywheel funk of Mess About It to the stoic ballad It's Alright, magnificently framed by a crack band marshalled by Stones drummer Steve Jordan. A profoundly satisfying album, unreservedly recommended.

Mat Snow

You better you Bettye: LaVette delivers another barnstorming LP.

Danny Clinch

Damir Imamović

★★★★

The World And All That It Holds

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS. CD/DL/LP

Bosnian singer-songwriter's literary tale of love and loss.

As the singer explains in his sleevenotes: "Unfulfilled and even forbidden love has always been one of the essential themes of sevdah." The Bosnian song form, a distant cousin of fado, rebetika or morna and all the other urban blues, is thus the perfect accompaniment to Aleksandar Hemon's novel of the same name, a tale of two soldiers – one Muslim, one Jewish – who fall in love during the Great War. Here, he adapts Bosnian and Sephardic folk songs, adds his own material, and spins a yarn of longing and running away, with backing from his own tambur, plus bass, fiddle, percussion, and clarinet – so an essential listen if you like Eastern European or Middle Eastern music. The tunes are wonderful and Joe Boyd's production is lovely, but the standout feature is Imamović's voice – an astonishingly beautiful tenor brimming with sadness.

David Hutcheon

Wren Hinds

★★★★

Don't Die In The Bundu

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Cape Town-based acoustic troubadour's UK debut, alongside three preceding albums now on vinyl.

The title – Hinds was once held at gunpoint – suggests high drama, but from voice to arrangements the South African's fourth LP is low-key and languid, embodied more by the song title Gilded By The Sun, Silvered By The Moon. Nor does *Don't Die In The Bundu* bear any audible trace of Hinds's Kwazulu-Natal homeland, just that of his musician father's harmony-rich stash of records (including Everly and Louvin brothers) that suffuse these hushed ballads (think Villagers, Hiss Golden Messenger, Sufjan Stevens) with lyrics that dwell on the impact of Hinds's first child. Yet a subtle form of intensity emerges; likewise, a hint of the landscape's heat-haze in The Garden's delicate layers of bowed guitar, Indian harp and Japanese flute, over which Hinds dreams, wonders and worries, a hostage to whatever life throws at you.

Martin Aston

Ronnie D'Addario

★★★

All Gathered In One Room

HOMBURG. CD/DL

The Lemon Twigs' songwriter dad, accompanied by both sons.

No living vicariously through his sons for Ronnie D'Addario. Though Twigs Brian and Michael guest here, dad's been crafting theatrical baroque pop for decades now, his coups including the Carpenters' cover of his own Falling For Love. That Ronnie grew up in Manhattan's theatre district is transparent listening to *All Gathered In One Room*, its title track a pirate stagey sing-along, and opener A Shot In The Dark a catchy list song that conjures rows of bopping Muppets. Idiosyncratic, eccentric lyrics are a speciality ("The Statue of Liberty/Asked me to supper"), while kooky stand-outs All From Me Bed and Come One Come All evoke the more flamboyant '70s hits of Dean Friedman, Carole Bayer Sager and Andrew Gold. This isn't dad cashing in; more his way of showing the apple/Twigs didn't fall far from the tree.

James McNair

Belbury Poly

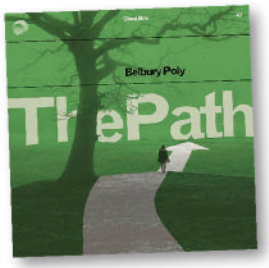
★★★★

The Path

GHOST BOX. CD/DL/LP

Latest folklore-noir dispatch from Ghost Box founder Jim Jupp's recording alias.

The Ghost Box aesthetic, prescribing an imagined, parallel world where retro-futurist library music, pastoral prog and wyrd folk define the *Zeitgeist*, might be a



postmodern caprice, yet much of the label's output transcends knowing irony – Belbury Poly's seven previous LPs, which range evocatively across the hauntological, Wicker Man-meets-Quatermass landscape, included. This time nodding to the soundtrack work of Roy Budd and Roger Webb, *The Path* finds BP lynchpin Jupp and his studio assistants fashioning 17 by turns groovy and mysterioso cues, many framing the narration of Anglophile American author Justin Hopper. His poetic, gnomic observations on exile amid ineffable English scenery seem as uncanny and nostalgia-suffused as the music – memorably so on the synth-washed Highways And Byways and gently phantasmagorical Pixie-Led – while many of the instrumentals, notably the delightfully lugubrious title track, might have fallen off a schools music programme from 1972.

David Sheppard

William The Conqueror

★★★

Excuse Me While I Vanish

CHRYSALIS. CD/DL/LP

Fourth outing from Cornish indie-folk trio.

William, as they call themselves, are known for their blend of Nashville-style Americana stirred into English folk – but this album kicks off far more raucously. Opener, The Puppet And The Puppeteer rocks with the speed and throttle of The Blockheads: throbbing guitar, swaggering drums and the droll baritone of frontman Ruarri Joseph. A vocal mix of Ian Dury and Richard Thompson, Joseph shrugs caustic, self-deprecating lyrics ("Riding the wave of a blissful autonomy…") that only point up the heart on his sleeve. It's breaking in ultra-tender The Bruises, and by dreamy, Laurel Canyon-esque L.W.Y., he's gruffly baring his soul. Somebody Else barrels along, wondering bitterly what the point of being a posturing muso might be. There follow tracks of downbeat introspection, salvaged by a closer of sweet, uplifting simplicity. "In your arms, babe – if just for now." Love and hope at their humblest.

Glyn Brown

Damir Imamović: exploring sevdah's love themes.

Almin Zrno, Amelia Read Photography

FOLK

BY JIM WIRTH

Me Lost Me

★★★★

RPG

UPSET THE RHYTHM. CD/DL/LP

Modern rubbish is life: uncanny North-east collective's folk 2.0.

"Not because we need it to last, just because we needed to make it," sings Newcastle-based auteur Jayne Dent, giving her take on divine human endeavour on Science And Art, the closer to her fourth sci-fi voyage as Me Lost Me. If old-school folk celebrates the mad accident of the songs and scraps that escaped the trash compacter of history, RPG (translation for Luddites: 'Role-Playing Game') refocuses that sense of wonder toward the endless changing jumble of 21st century creativity. A glitching, AI take on The Unthanks, it melds trad techniques and Minecraft burble into "a massive, multi-player online dream", as Dent puts it on The God Of Stuck Time. Stylistic touchstones veer from the Watersons, Grandaddy and Richard Dawson out toward the William Blake's 7 weird of Julia Holter, Henry Cow and Julie Tippetts' prog-jazz outlier *Sunset Glow*. Incomprehensible/irresistible.

ALSO RELEASED

The Magpie Arc

★★★★

Glamour In The Grey

COLLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE. CD/DL/LP

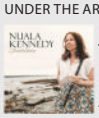
Newly available on vinyl, this all-star British folk rock re-enactment is a *Liege & Lief*-altering experience for those who know their Forest from their Trees. Nancy Kerr does leather'n'lace Maddy Prior on Wassail and The Gay Goshawk, while the hitherto sensible Martin Simpson goes AC/DC electric on Tough As Teddy Gardner. Dave Mattacks-esque thunderclap drums add to the elemental racket. *Ten Man Mop* turned up to 11.

Nuala Kennedy

★★★★

Shorelines

UNDER THE ARCH. CD/DL



Up alongside The Corrs and The Mary Wallopers in Dundalk's folk-adjacent hall of fame, singing flautist and Will Oldham foil Nuala Kennedy charms on this glossy assortment of women's songs. Died For Love variant Father Father sparkles, there is a pleasing '80s Van Morrison tingle to the instrumental Saltwater, while she locates the hostage video grimace behind the supposed happy ending on The Cavan Road.

Dallahan

★★★★

Speak Of The Devil

DALLAHAN MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

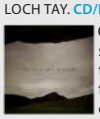
With Deliverance banjo and ocean-going accordion, the rip-roaring Edinburgh quartet set an unlikely course for 16th century Latin America on their fourth LP. Marina weighs up the crimes of Cortés the killer, while daunting closer The Bullet And The Blade plummets into the destruction the Spanish wreaked upon the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan. Think '70s Al Stewart at a Day Of The Dead barn dance, and be merry.

Louise Dodds & Elchin Shirinov

★★★★

Two Hours After Midnight

LOCH TAY. CD/DL



Cleo Laine warning sirens may be triggered at the thought of this collection of dinner jazz-savvy takes of Scottish songs for voice and piano, but *Two Hours After Midnight* is a classy and largely scat-free zone. Azeri pianist Shirinov's uptown arrangements meld Keith Jarrett and Randy Newman, while Dodds's takes on Ae Fond Kiss and Night Visiting Song have a Kate Rusby/Judee Sill clarity. *JW*

FILTER ALBUMS

Balancing act: Osees' John Dwyer is anarchic, irreverent and thrillingly intense.

Osees

★★★★

Intercepted Message

IN THE RED. CD/DL/LP

John Dwyer's LA transplants bring more manic energy.

"AT LONG last, verse/chorus," Osees leader John Dwyer has said of *Intercepted Message*, but if this is pop it's seedy, stimulant-friendly pop with an anarchic and irreverent underbelly. A typically frenetic spirit pilots gonzoid synth nuggets Stunner and Blank Chems, but Die Laughing's fractured garage-disco is something else again, its taut Talking Heads groove strewn with the dyspeptic fizz of chemical reactions at Jekyll's lab. Elsewhere, Dwyer sounds sinister on choice, rapid-fire caricatures Goon and Sleazoid Psycho, and opines "Your king's a cunt" on the title track. Much of *IM* is thrillingly intense, then; a rabbit punch with pop-prog interludes and Devo-like hooks. Osees are rivalling Guided By Voices for sheer productivity these days. Indeed, it's hard to picture them doing anything other than toiling at the forge.

James McNair

Aja Monet

★★★★

When The Poems Do What They Do

DRINK SUM WTR. DL/LP

Brooklyn wordsmith's nourishing debut balances spirituality, joy and politics.

Organiser, educator, and award-winning wordsmith Aja Monet's debut is firmly in the lineage of Gil Scott-Heron, Nikki Giovanni and Roach Om. Self-described as "a homegirl made of magic", her ability to perceive stardust within the everyday is seductive (eg, Why My Love?, a thoughtful, prickly, often hilarious investigation of the many dimensions of affection). But this dreamy mood is balanced by several harder-edged longform narrative pieces. The Perfect Storm is startling, an epic set to simmering spiritual jazz drawing a throughline from the middle passage to modern-day inequality with compelling focus and imagination. The Devil You Know, meanwhile, spends 10 minutes on the ugly frontlines of modern American politics, eschewing easy answers to reason that "the ballot is not a bullet, but it can be a border or a bridge". Unsettling, uplifting stuff.

Stevie Chick

Miles Kane

★★★

One Man Band

MODERN SKY. CD/DL/LP/MC

Birkenhead songwriter's fifth album; not wholly dissimilar to previous four.

With The Last Shadow Puppets on hold, Miles Kane retreated to his native Merseyside for his fifth album, produced by his cousin, The Coral's James Skelly. Kane plays to his strengths: there's that part needy, part swaggering voice. There are Kane's trademark cascading, rambling melodies, not least on Heal, which, pointedly for one derailed by his own boorish behaviour, talks of "career suicide". And there are big anthems such as Troubled Son, Doubles and Baggio, a tribute to Italian footballer Roberto Baggio, who Kane claims to have fallen for during the 1994 World Cup. If there isn't a great leap forward, there is progression on assorted fronts, so The Best Is Yet To Come embraces all-out rock, but Scared Of Love ("I said I'm sorry, but I know that's not enough") suggests acoustic ballads could be an alternative way ahead.

John Aizlewood

Érol Josué

★★★

Pelerinaj

VILLAGE HUT. CD/DL

Ordained Haitian vodou priest returns with a message of respect.

Showcasing a voice that overrides your limited understanding of Haitian Creole, Josué's second album has been a while coming, but with good reason. *Régléman* was released in 2007; since then, Josué has been immersing himself in his culture and, as director of Haiti's National Bureau of Ethnology, spreading the word – which is that, if the rest of the world showed the respect for nature his religion does, the planet would be in better shape. His music underlines the journey he has been on for 16 years – literally, the album title translates as "Pilgrimage" – picking up ideas as he travels: rather than the full-on percussion you may expect, there are strings, Far Eastern touches and a fair bit of jazz. Though it's arguably too long, its climax is an explosive live track, recorded at a vodou ceremony, and well worth sticking about for.

David Hutcheon

Joshua Radin

★★★

Though The World Will Tell Me So, Volume 1 + 2

NETTWERK. CD/DL/LP

US singer's mid-life crisis? He'd rather be in Europe.

Hurtling towards his 50th birthday, I'd Rather Be With You hitmaker Joshua Radin utilised his looming mid-life crisis by taking himself off to Europe last year, gap-year-style. There he recorded some of *Though The World… Volume 1*, digitally released earlier this year. With *Vol. 2* soon following, Radin merged the pair and, *voilà*, his tenth LP. For all the change of location and lifestyle, Radin's essentials remain: that whisper of a rueful bedroom voice, so wounded on Over The City; the gentle acoustic strum that propels Broken and a rather lovelorn lyrical way ("You're everything I ever needed, baby," he clichés on the monsoon wet Don't Give Up On Me). From there, he takes uncharted routes, so Running From The Dawn overflows with oomph and Man Of The Year is enhanced by its full-fat production. He's doing fine.

John Aizlewood

Flaer

★★★★

Preludes

ODDA. DL/LP

Arcadian études from Leicestershire-based fine artist and multi-instrumentalist Realf Heygate.

The debut release on Leaf label offshoot ODDA is an exercise in ineffably English pastoral evocation, its seven delicate instrumental essays built around Heygate's simple piano and cello figures and garlanded with bird song and distant church bell chimes. Predicated on themes of memory and the uncanny, this is music drawn from the same well as Virginia Astley's *From Gardens Where We Feel Secure*, with recurrent hints of the Penguin Cafe Orchestra and Robert Kirby's idyllic chamber arrangements for Nick Drake. Elegiac tranquillity is Flaer's stock-in-trade, and while the intimate rawness of The Hill's cello and piano interplay is typical, a brace of guitar-based pieces, Landlock and Follow, expand the palette, the latter a kind of triptych evolving from a pretty, World Standard-like sketch to a thing of nostalgia-suffused, near-symphonic mellifluousness – the sonic analogue of a blissful summer's afternoon.

David Sheppard

Greta Van Fleet

★★★

Starcatcher

LAVA/REPUBLIC/EMI. CD/DL/LP

Michigan quartet reach for hard rock's crown on album number three.

In recent lavish promo shots, Frankenmuth, Michigan's close-knit Grammy grabbers Greta Van Fleet come on like kohl'd and bejewelled desert seers, and, lo, *Starcatcher* is freighted with talk of the cosmos and esoteric teachers. No matter that some of their songs still bear their potter's mark (Jimmy Page's 'Zoso' symbol): Greta Van Fleet are enormous now; a beacon for young hard rock fans who want their own exemplars of rifferama, not the ones mum and dad still bang on about. The irony is, of course, that Fate Of The Faithful is ostensibly No Quarter, Meeting The Master is Thank You, and The Falling Sky cribs a Robert Plant-style harp solo so perfectly that GVF can likely taste his spit. Be in no doubt, however, that frontman Josh Kiszka's Olympian wail can part the waves of cynicism and make the scales fall from your eyes.

James McNair

The Tinfoil Biter

JAZZ

BY ANDY COWAN

Damon Locks & Rob Mazurek

★★★★

New Future City Radio

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM. CD/DL/LP

Chicago mavericks create fake pirate radio station to explore community and transformation.

Along with Makaya McCraven and Angel Bat Dawid, Locks and Mazurek are at the heart of Chicago's thriving ecosystem of modern experimentalists. Nothing is off limits on their latest, a dead air-free faux radio broadcast predicated on dream-like beatscapes and sample-driven sound collages that mutate on a whim. Locks' animated lyrics enhance its build-up of short, impressionistic tracks – channelling Chuck D and The Beatnigs on the industrial Yes!, exploring fractal poetics on Fitting Splits Reverb Adage – as Mazurek's trumpets add a haunting, human touch, not least on 10-minute lullaby from the edge Twilight Shimmer, above buzzing cicadas and birdsong. A bizarre middle ground between their respective Black Monument Ensemble and Exploding Star Orchestra concerns, this pared-back sonic trip sings with freshness and immediacy.

Andy Cowan

Mapache

★★★★

Swinging Stars

INNOVATIVE LEISURE/CALICO DISCOS. CD/DL/LP

Blissed out, blazed up California duo's fifth album.

If you've ever wanted to breeze up the coast highway from Los Angeles to Malibu in a convertible as the sun sets out across the glittering Pacific Ocean, *Swinging Stars* will take you there. The Mapache duo of Sam Blasucci and Clay Finch, friends since their high school days on the outer fringes of LA, decided that for album number five they were going to change things up from their previous, very intimate record, 2022's *Roscoe's Dream*. Not that they've thrown out the David Gates melodies, Everly Brothers harmonies and early-Eagles soft country r ock swing, they've just turned their hazy daze up to 11. The intoxicating acoustic strum of What A Summer, soft and pillowy Midnight, and close harmonies of Encinal Canyon – where Finch regularly hikes – are all truly transporting, as much a product of their environment as The Beach Boys or The Brady Bunch.

Andy Fyfe

Susanna

★★★★

Baudelaire & Orchestra

SUSANNASONATA. CD/DL/LP

Norway's Ms Wallumrød sings French poetry, with strings, horns, the works.

Since debuting circa 2004 via sparkly pop-rock covers alongside the avant-techno Magical Orchestra, Susanna has followed a fiercely highbrow muse, of late persistently setting Charles Baudelaire's 19th century Decadent verse to music, first on 2020's *Baudelaire & Piano*, which presented skeletal, ivory-tinkling excerpts from Les Fleurs Du Mal, then last year's weirder *Elevation*. This latest instalment goes maximalist, enlisting Oslo's progressive KORK orchestra to finesse more sophisticated overhauls from the two previous records, with text newly translated by Anthony Mortimer. The latter development, of course, makes *Baudelaire & Orchestra* more accessible for English-speakers, while in places – Burial's 'catchy' titular refrain; Longing For Nothingness's brass-enhanced wondrousness – Wallumrød all but forges classical pop from this darkest lyrical material. Elsewhere, *Elevation* collaborator Stina Stjern interpolates disorientating white noise and insect-scuttling off cassettes, but KORK's graceful scoring and Susanna's full-blooded yet supremely detailed voicing make this a treat for Björk and late-'60s Scott Walker fans alike.

Andrew Perry

Jamie Kelter Davis

Damon Locks (right) & Rob Mazurek: looking to a *New Future…*

Mokoomba

★★★★

Tusona: Tracings In The Sand

OUTHERE. CD/DL/LP

An invigorating blend of Zimrock, soukous and tight harmonies.

Respected Zimbabwean sextet Mokoomba became festival favourites in the early 2010s, following the success of debut album *Rising Tide*. *Tusona* is their first self-produced LP, allowing the group its most genuine expression to date. Opening prayer Tamvela Mama sets the tone as a guitar-led dance groove, Mathias Muzaza's expressive lead vocals answered by a brilliant harmonic chorus from his backing musicians, with highlife horns from Ghana's Santrofi completing the picture. Elsewhere, Ndipe, Kulindiswe and Makolo have soukous undercurrents, Makisi has salsa in the keyboards and Njawane a touch of desert blues. Kandonga drops down to pure percussion and voice, reminding of the band's traditional grounding, while Afro-soul singer Ulethu guests on Manina, a sombre response to the pandemic. High production values and attention to detail achieve superior results here.

David Katz

Janelle Monáe

★★★★

The Age Of Pleasure

BAD BOY. CD/DL/LP

First album in five years from pop's rainbow Mona Lisa. Guests include Grace Jones, Seun Kuti & Egypt 80.

The former Afrofuturist is resolutely now pop's young, black out-and-proud freak-flag-flier-in-chief, and this summery celebration of hedonism spanning vanilla to kink is not just supremely enjoyable but, as Monáe has stated, a provocation in defiance of the reactionary right: we're young, beautiful and having fun – and you? Though Monáe's powerful voice and layered harmonies run the show, *TAOP* is a team effort where not only do Grace Jones, Sister Nancy and Seun Kuti appear in cameo but Barrington Levy earns a writing credit – reggae as well as R&B, pop and hip-hop pep every step. Sensuality and wit boss all 14 tunes; Float and Lipstick Lover were the seductive first two singles, and almost every track could compete on 45, Rush and Water Slide especially. Though shorter and lighter than 2018's *Dirty Computer*, it delivers its full measure of pleasure.

Mat Snow

High Pulp

★★★★

Days In The Desert

ANTI-. CD/DL/LP

Experimental Seattle collective at their most futuristic and concise.

Born from their local DIY scene, High Pulp seriously up the compositional ante on their third album. The Seattle outsiders' quixotic jazz fusion – Miles Davis, Sun Ra and Weather Report crossed with post-rock and kosmische – is played with contained energy on Bad Infinity and Fatigue, cryptic sound puzzles predicated on tingling electronics, raw percussive flits and Victory Nguyen and Andrew Morrill's interweaving tenor and alto saxes. A slew of like-minded sonic manipulators enhance their peculiar vision: Prince bassist MonoNeon lending low-end swagger to Never In My Short Sweet Life, Jeff Parker's slippery, poised fretwork adding texture to Unified Dakotas' luscious feast of horns, while James Brandon Lewis's melodic nous and kinetic intensity light up grooving multi-layered standout Dirtmouth. Fluid, cultured, but never wilfully indulgent, *Days In The Desert* refuses to sit still.

ALSO RELEASED

Mama Terra

★★★★

The Summoned

ACID JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

First demoed during lockdown using samples, Glasgow pianist Marco Cafolla's insistent compositions grew wings when it lifted. Saxophonist Konrad Wiszniewski lights up vamping opener Ruptura, guest trumpeter Jeremy Pelt grabs glory on the big band-ish title track, both nod to Coltrane amid A Mind Supreme's expansive rolling keys. *The Summoned* may have been born in strife, but bursts with such zeal and vigour you'd never know.

Peace Flag Ensemble

★★★★

Astral Plains

WE ARE BUSY BODIES. DL/LP

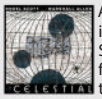
The Saskatchewan collective's second continues where 2021's *Noteland* left off. Intimately textured compositions The Work and Bluets allow Paul Gutheil's woozy sax and Dalton Lam's keening trumpet to slither around Jon Neher's piano poetics and Travis Packer's languid bass. Short sax/drums wild-out Love Notes (For Eli) is a brief wake-up call on a pitch-perfect triumph of self-restraint that canters at its own stately pace.

Knoel Scott Feat. Marshall Allen

★★★★

Celestial

NIGHT DREAMER. DL/LP/MC



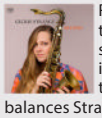
After four decades in Sun Ra's Arkestra, Scott's long overdue first solo LP is a rare treat. While Les Funambules and Conversation With The Cosmos have fun with form and structure, straddling populism and the avant-garde with insouciant grace, the theatrical title track lets Scott's unabashedly romantic voice hold sway, before 99-year-old Allen's EWI goes intergalactic. If not revelatory, *Celestial* certainly feels timeless.

Cecilie Strange

★★★★

Beyond

APRIL. DL/LP



Recorded live in the round, this slow-burning, intense ode to the circle of life balances Strange's throaty tenor sax tones with the empathetic backing of pianist Peter Rosendal, drummer Jakob Høyer and bassist Thommy Andersson (accompanists on predecessors *Blue* and *Bilkan*). Whether tackling traditional Swedish folksong Byssan Lull or traversing The Great Grand's ornate slow crawl, *Beyond* is bluesy, becalming Nordic jazz noir of the highest order. *AC*

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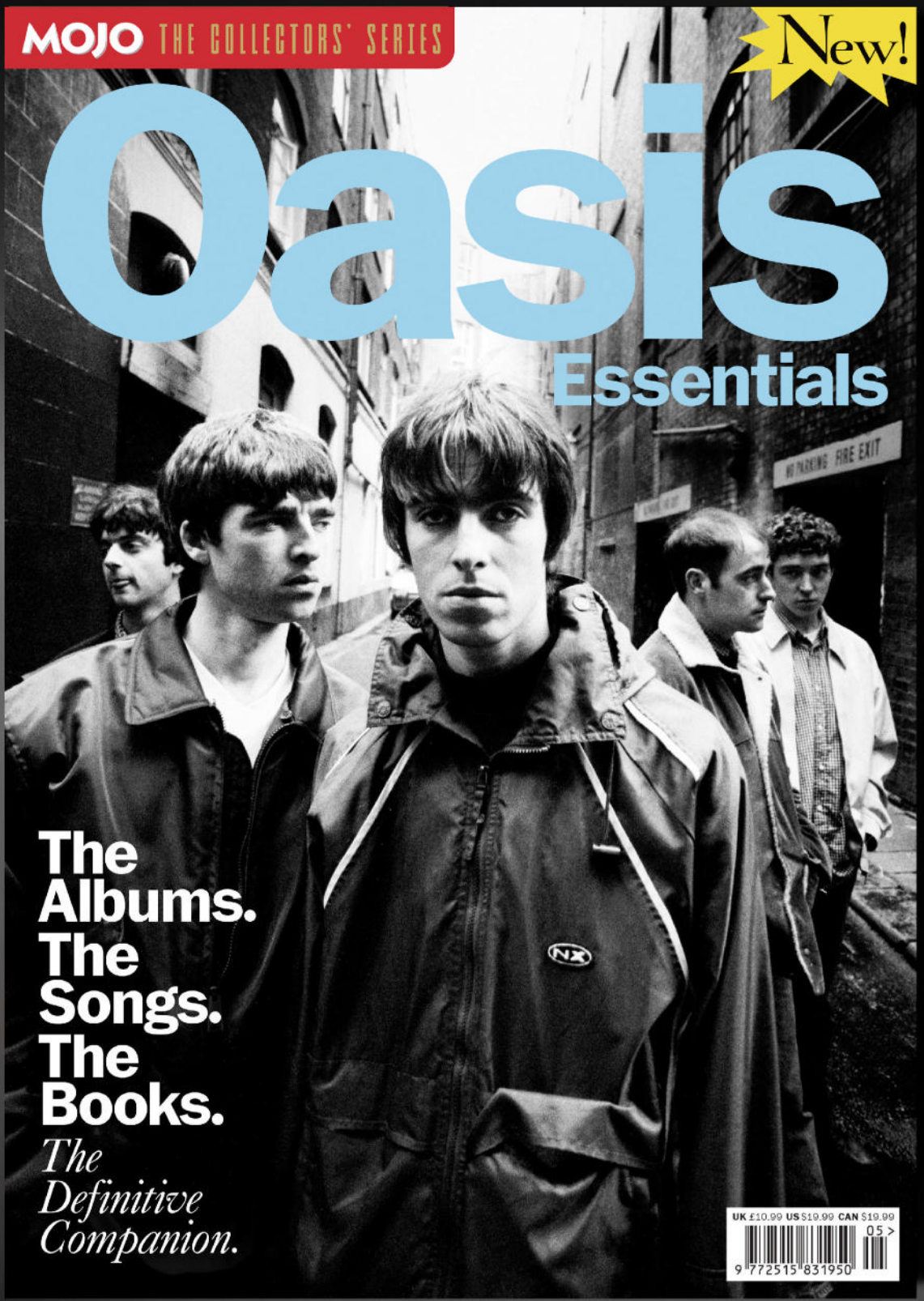

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Bebel Gilberto: in the name of the father.

Bebel Gilberto

★★★★

João

PIAS. CD/DL/LP

A tribute to a father and bossa nova's golden age.

JOÃO, SAYS Bebel Gilberto, "is a musical love letter to my father", her father of course being João Gilberto, the bossa nova pioneer who died in 2019. Recorded once again with Thomas Bartlett (who produced 2020's *Agora*), the album is imbued with an understated beauty and mellow vibe, at odds with the recording of the 11 covers of her father's songs here, each one tied to a personal memory that often reduced the singer to tears. As with *Agora* then, it's the sound of someone grieving and healing, it's also about connection; a daughter with her father and her heritage through the intangible magic found in music itself, her soft-spoken vocal, whispery, floaty, matched to gentle acoustic guitar on hits (see Ela E Carioca; Desafinado) and rarer material (Valsa, written specifically for her) possessing a subtle and mesmerising power.

Lois Wilson

Hozier

★★★★

Unreal Unearth

ISLAND. CD/DL/LP/MC

On his third try, the Irish singer-songwriter is bigger and better than that song about church.

"Let me wrap my teeth around the world," pleads Hozier early into his third and most convincing album. It is a mission statement of sorts for the 33-year-old Irish romantic, wildly famous for a decade now for turning the act of being taken to church into a singalong roundhouse about sex. Indeed, he strives to connect extreme ends, musically and thematically – death and rebirth, extravagant pop anthems and quiet, brookside folk. After his debut's gospel stomp made way for a surprisingly discursive follow-up, these 16 songs shape his most protean set yet. To wit, he bookends the Nick Drake swoop of I, Carrion with the Imagine Dragons-sized force of Francesca and the cityscape sweep of the soul-sampling Eat Your Young. Hozier's audacity can feel outsized and overbearing, but his tandem of earnestness and eccentricity here is more often winning than not. Think Van Morrison's early-'70s ardour, funnelled into our streaming future.

Grayson Haver Currin

Andrew Hung

★★★★

Deliverance

LEX. CD/DL/LP

Fuck Buttons founder's soul-bearing blends cinematic electronics with darkwave guitars.

Andrew Hung has found his voice on his third LP. The vocal hesitancy that dogged *Realisationship* and *Devastations* is gone, replaced by confidence in his twitchy mix of Howard Devoto and early Eno, quivering with contrasting emotions. Dramatic standouts Ocean Mouth and Changes, anguished tales of cat and mouse, feel precarious, balanced on a knife edge of hurt as bottled emotions come spilling out, the soundtracker for cult director Jim Hoskings painting ultra-vivid scenes with layers of barbed synths, clashing drums and sweeping strings. Hung goes full goth on the Cure-ish Soldier, his most anthemic statement, while epic, slow-building closer Love Is has traces of modern-era Gary Numan in its baroque sound design. A cathartic wrestle with identity, *Deliverance* will sit well with fans of the original Some Bizzare roster.

Andy Cowan

Girl Ray

★★★

Prestige

MOSHI MOSHI. CD/DL/LP

Muswell Hillbilly indie trio go disco!

With 2017's swooning alt-guitar heartbreak debut, *Earl Grey*, these melody-rich north Londoners prompted references to female-fronted proto-indie pioneers like Girls At Our Best and Young Marble Giants. Led by gifted songsmith Poppy Hankin, Girl Ray soon migrated into the no-less blissfully languorous soundworld of contemporary R&B for 2019's follow-up *Girl*. Here, four years later, they shift their focus again, towards disco – not the expensive orchestral kind forged by '70s icons Chic and Barry White, more the post-millennial digi-assimilation of Daft Punk and Róisín Murphy. Big-hitters True Love and Give Me Your Love certainly set the glitterball spinning, but Hankin's husky voicing and 'worrier' outlook place *Prestige* far from the heedless abandon of Get Lucky or indeed Melbourne's new-generation party-starters Confidence Man. Aqueous groove Up tackles mid-romance feelings of inadequacy, while coldwave-y Begging You Now infers a darker supplication. Ever-infectious, however, and rarely short of good fun, this one should substantially further the threesome's upward trajectory.

Andrew Perry

Anna St Louis

★★★★

In The Air

WOODSIST. CD/DL/LP

Second singer-songwriter album from Kevin Morby's mate.

It's five years since Anna St Louis's debut album *If Only There Was A River*, six since fellow Kansas City-raised musician Kevin Morby released her first EP. In that time, she moved away from the LA folk set that first brought her exposure and settled into life as a hotel desk clerk in upstate New York, living in a small woodsy cabin. As her world shrank, however, her music expanded. Oddly, in that LA folk scene her songs largely dealt with the loneliness of heartache, but now, tucked away and isolated, her world seems so much brighter. Melodies shine as her voice sparkles, her happy ease expressed beautifully by the tinkling piano that introduces opening track Trace. Even the melancholy pedal steel and regrets of Better Days are parlayed into a positive future, not a forlorn past. St Louis's apparent contentment is a very good look on her.

Andy Fyfe

Belle Scar

★★★

Atoms

PLASTIC SOUND. CD/DL/LP

UK-resident Canadian's moody debut album invokes big-screen drama.

Atoms opens with the disconsolate Trapped. "I'm a prisoner of my own… locked inside the emptiness of space" sings the Montréal-born, London-based Belle Scar. A solo piano is swiftly supplemented by fully orchestrated string swells, a choir and repeated crescendos. Scar's husky voice is flamboyant, imbued with a show-tune swagger. Shadows cast by David Arnold, John Barry and Danny Elfman are never far in this trip-hop-infused world. That voice is pushed to the top of its range, with a full-force delivery. The *Sturm und Drang* inherent to this determinedly filmic debut album renders it a breathless experience – Shirley Bassey born from goth. Strip away this sonic tempest's ornamentation and, within, hints emerge of a more restrained torch-song origin for each song. Should any forthcoming James Bond film need a composer and singer for its theme, look no further.

Kieron Tyler

Co-Pilot

★★★★

Rotate

DELL'ORSO. DL/LP

Bold psych-pop debut by Soundcarriers voice Leonore Wheatley and songwriter Alan Roberts, AKA Jim Noir.

Rotate takes off with a helicopter of synths on Swim To Sweden. What appears to be a recording of an ice cream van intro gives way to thumping beats and a tidal wave of Moog riffs, suggesting the quirkiness of Ariel Pink. Co-Pilot's debut is not short of expressive elements. Both Wheatley and Roberts bring the attributes of their respective projects: the retrofuturism of The Soundcarriers and the watercolour minimalism of Jim Noir are present – yet *Rotate* is more immediate than either. Within this ethereal sphere, the songs often act as travelogues, capturing scenery or geographic locations: lush landscapes on effervescent Spring Beach nodding to Stereolab; Japan on Motosaka, featuring a sample of Ryuichi Sakamoto's Thousand Knives; warmer hues and bossa nova rhythms on Move To It. The record turns full circle with the waltzing and breathtaking finale Corner House, hinting at a metaphorical homecoming.

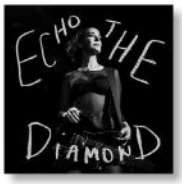
Irina Shtreis

FILTER ALBUMS EXTRA

Corduroy
★★★★
Men Of The Cloth
ACID JAZZ. DL/LP
Marking the 30th anniversary of their debut *Dad Man Cat*, the organ four-piece make a six-tracker in the same mould, with rare grooves and R&B rave-ups. Code 3 is a nod to John Entwistle, while No More Me Me Me is redolent of Jack McDuff. *LW*

Django Django
Off Planet
★★★
BECAUSE MUSIC. CD/DL/LP
While Django Django's eclectic impulses roam wild – Krautrock, house, techno, acid rave and electronica – on this sprawling set, they're anchored by duets with Stealing Sheep, Yuuko Sings and Self Esteem (on thumping standout Complete Me). Quality control is high throughout. *AC*

Fassine
★★★★
Never To Heaven
DEFAULT COLLECTIVE. DL
This slippery London trio's high-concept fourth LP muses on modern self-obsession amid the precision earworm avant-pop of Drerty (Acid Drops) and dark electronics of Fifty-Move Fools. Sarah Palmer's voice could cut glass, as evinced by a rip through Julian Cope's Sunspots. *AC*



Margaret Glaspy
★★★★
Echo The Diamond
ATO. CD/DL/LP
A return to the solid alt-rock of her 2016 debud, Glaspy's third is well-crafted and unfussy, foregrounding her sturdy guitar and clear-sighted lyrics that range between grungy disaffection (super-catchy Act Natural) and brittle yearning (Hammer And The Nail). *JB*

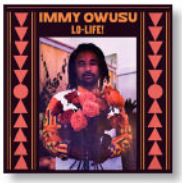
Danny Paul Grody
★★★★
Arc Of Day
THREE LOBED. DL/LP
San Francisco's Grody is one of those acoustic guitarists beating a steady path away from folk virtuosity towards a more serene, ethereal music. Robbie Basho's Windham Hill/New Age phase is a decent comparison: a contemplative soundtrack for long hikes in the redwoods. *JM*

Gunn Truscinski Nace
★★★★
Glass Band
THREE LOBED. DL/LP
Steve Gunn reunites with regular partner John Truscinski (drums) and avant-guitarist Bill Nace for seven fissile, often very beautiful, explorations. Those open to a mellower cousin of Sonic Youth's late-'90s SYR series are encouraged to investigate. *JM*

Hardwicke Circus
★★★★
Fly The Flag
ALTERNATIVE FACTS. CD/DL/LP
Produced by Stiff's Dave Robinson and with guests Earl Slick and Terry Edwards, the Carlisle quintet's second rocks Dexys-level dynamism: Motown dancers, E Street shuffles, baritone 'bom bom's, stirring brass and ballads laced with romance and humour. *JB*

MADMADMAD
★★★
Behavioural Sink Delirium
BAD VIBRATIONS. DL/LP
This London-via-France trio's third puts no wave, post-punk and disco through a mangle (think Residents, Devo, Snapped Ankles). Exploring dysfunctional beats (Totes Amazeballs), sinister motorik grooves (Krautjerk) or celestial soundscapes (In The Garden Of Mezcal), it's a blast. *AC*

Christian Madden
★★★★
The Extra Weight
FRIENDLY RECORDINGS. DL/LP
With credits for Denny Laine, Spencer Davis and Liam Gallagher, Earlies founder and Hammond whiz Madden shows off compositional skills on his debut. Booker T and Tower Of Power are evoked amid the title track's swirl and Athletico Talbot's cinematic thrust. *AC*



Immy Owusu
★★★★
Lo-Life!
HOPESTREET RECORDINGS. DL/LP
With nimble grooves, electric fingerpicking, analog synths and call-and-response backings, *Lo-Life!* is a swaggering sonic mish-mash. Members of Surprise Chef and Karate Boogaloo help Owusu's debut join the dots between Ghanaian highlife, Zamrock and psychedelia. *AC*

EXTENDED PLAY

Nicky Wire
Intimism
BANDCAMP. DL
TITLED AFTER an art movement devoted to quotidian domestic scenes, Nicky Wire's digital-only second solo album honours the interior foxholes we all retreat to. "Radio's on, typewriting clicking," notes Keeper Of The Flame, wherein Wire diagnoses a "lifelong affair with tunnel vision". *Intimism* draws on '80s indie's classicist artisans: notably Ballad Of The Baby Blue's Go-Betweens memory dive, and Tactical Retreat, where Wire assumes the impassive cool of Pete Astor soliloquising on the weary acquisition of wisdom. Amid much self-lacerating wit, some orch-pop flourish, piano boogaloo and two 'Migraine' jazz interludes, there are twin emotional peaks: White Musk's Spectorist lustre – clarinet played by Wire's daughter – and Contact Sheets, a bittersweet anthem to photographic memories right up there with R.E.M.'s Camera. It's manic outside, but *Intimism* is a beautifully designed safe haven.
Keith Cameron

Nicky Wire: happy among the ghosts and flowers.

Oiro Pena
★★★★
Puna
WE ARE BUSY BODIES. DL/LP
Finnish jazz collective supply spiritual sustenance in droves on album two, spaced-out creations like Puna and Kaiju Kaiju evoking Sun Ra and Moondog. Merikukka Kiviharju's folk-inflected vocals further up the intimacy, with Calamity Caravan coming on like an off-kilter jug band hitting the sauce. *AC*

Prairiewolf
★★★
Prairiewolf
CENTRIPETAL FORCE. CD/DL/LP
The Colorado trio's debut comes dressed in cosmic Americana drag, but the prevailing vibe of these Mellotron/Fender Rhodes/lap steel/drumbox reveries is that of faintly psychedelicised tiki bar easy listening. Still very nice, resembling as it does Air's pre-*Moon Safari* work. *JM*

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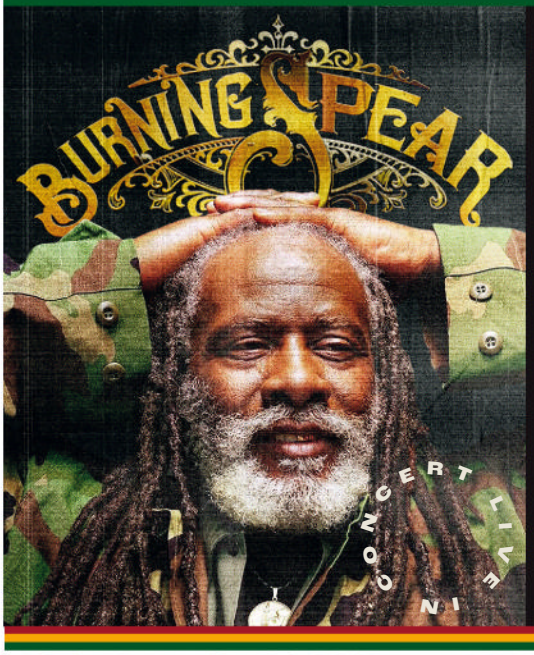

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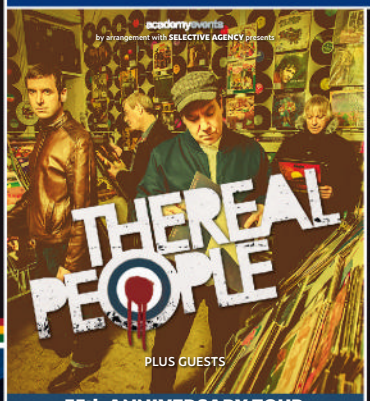

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The supermodals

Rediscovered performances documenting the saxophone colossus's short-lived quintet including multi-instrumentalist Eric Dolphy. **Andrew Male** holds on tight.

John Coltrane With Eric Dolphy

★★★★

Evenings At The Village Gate

IMPULSE!. CD/DL/LP

1961 WAS AN annus mirabilis for John Coltrane. In March of that year his radical, modal reworking of Rodgers & Hammerstein's My Favorite Things was an unlikely radio hit for Atlantic Records. Then, in April, the then 36-year-old saxophonist became the first artist signed to Creed Taylor's new Impulse! label, recording the defiant *Africa/Brass* and briefly augmenting his piano/bass/drums line-up of McCoy Tyner, Reggie Workman and Elvin Jones with 34-year-old experimental multi-instrumentalist, Eric Dolphy. By the end of the year came another three Coltrane LPs, all of them capturing the sound of an artist in a constant state of flux and evolution.

Of course, that wasn't the whole story. While the LPs were Coltrane's documented broadcasts to the world, his live sessions in the clubs of Cleveland, LA, Detroit and most specifically New York captured a different kind of creative performance, more intense, combustible, fleeting, and contentious. Part of that rare uncertain quality was down to the presence of Dolphy, who Coltrane had first befriended in New York in 1959. First showcased to the world on the controversial 1962 Impulse! release, *Coltrane "Live" At The Village Vanguard*, the union of Dolphy and Coltrane is now seen by many as the charged genesis point for free jazz, the saxophonist's own entry point into a more spiritual, soul-searching sound, and a vital document from the meagre recorded legacy of Dolphy, who, in the wake of his death just three years later in June 1964, came to be seen as an impish, puzzle at the heart of jazz modernism, a gnomic, misunderstood genius forever in need of revival or rebirth. However, back in 1961 the duo's elemental, modal playing was regarded by some as a step into nihilism and anarchy, an "anti-jazz", in the contemporary words of Downbeat magazine's Leonard Feather.

Such historical opinions can often seem comically outmoded when placed next to the music being critiqued. But listening to this recording, captured at Art D'Lugoff's cavernous basement venue in the heart of Greenwich Village by sound engineer Rich Alderson (see Back Story), is to hear an artist – Coltrane – trying to push through, playing tracks from old setlists but in a new way that rejects the old structures and, yes, that does invoke notions of anarchy.

Beginning with a version of My Favorite Things, with Elvin Jones drumming clean, hard hypnotic patterns, Reggie Workman's bass sure and steady, and McCoy Tyner's piano intense and beaming, Coltrane repeatedly sounds like a man trying to find a way over, under, through or beyond his own sound, taking his squalling soprano sax out to heights too dizzying, before coming back to the grounded surface melody. Dolphy, meanwhile, plays a high bird-song flute that seems to dance above it all, offering Coltrane possible paths for a lighter flight. The second track, a cover of Benny Carter's 1936 swing standard When Lights Are Low, begins as a low-slung blues amble, defined by Jones's up-beat rhythms and Workman's walking bass, before Dolphy's playfully loping bass clarinet is cut deep by Coltrane's high wailing soprano reed and Tyner's bright piano waltz which seems to have arrived from another, happier world entirely.

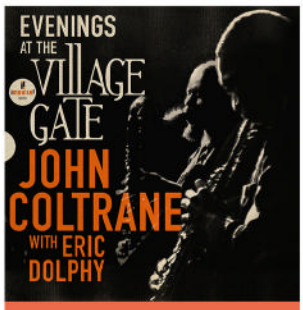
The degree to which this is a transitional recording is perhaps best exemplified by the early run through of Coltrane's Impressions, first recorded in the studio in 1962 but best known from the version captured at New York's Village Vanguard in November 1961. That version might be the finest documented example of the Coltrane/Dolphy quintet. Recorded with the same line-up as this album, it's a euphoric, exploratory masterclass in what Coltrane was capable of in 1961. Against Jones's driving polyrhythmic be-bop patterns Coltrane niggles away at a tiny harmonic idea reminiscent of Miles Davis's So What, before turning the whole thing upside down and inside out, Dolphy cutting in on incendiary agitated alto sax, the duo reaching for something ancient and primal as Tyler seemingly scales the walls with his glittering keyboard runs.

By contrast, the version here, as much to do with the drum-forward recording as anything, feels somehow more sluggish, Coltrane's and Dolphy's motivic Eastern patterns sounding disquieted and imprisoned, like two giant glittering insects trapped in a conservatory and only the duet between Jones and Tyler allowing any sense of escape.

It's as if the quintet has not yet achieved lift-off velocity. As such, the most fascinating tracks here are the older standards, like their version of Greensleeves, where you can actually hear Coltrane and Dolphy go up into the exosphere, push, circle, attempt to blast through and almost pass out, before returning back down into a swirling blue-sky glide, Tyner's glittering melodies providing a soothing landing.

The set ends with a 22-minute version of Africa, the Tyner-arranged big band number from *Africa/Brass* stripped back to quartet, but with the addition of second bassist, Art Davis. It's unarguably the LP's highlight with Workman providing a steady droning undertow and Davis dancing and weaving around the horns in the manner of some Yoruba trickster. The whole track possesses luxurious space, hypnotic mystery and tension that has the audience audibly gasping. When Coltrane and Dolphy's corrosive horns return, 17 minutes into the track, their arrival feels like both release and a celebration; a small rejuvenating taste of euphoria. "If you play in a place where they really like your group," Coltrane told Downbeat magazine in 1962, "they can make you play like you've never felt like playing before." With Africa you really feel like you're witness to one such historic moment.

In Ashley Kahn's exemplary linernotes to this release, which are accompanied by the memories of Workman and Alderson, he places great importance on that Downbeat article, particularly Dolphy and Coltrane's answers to the repeated question: "What are you trying to do?" Dolphy says he is trying to get to a state where "you have no idea what you're going to do next [or even] what could be done"; while Coltrane says he's hoping to "give a picture to the listener of the many wonderful things he knows of and senses in the universe… how magnificent and encompassing it is." In short, the magnificent and the unknown, a point where both player and audience are simultaneously lost and awestruck. With *Evenings At The Village Gate* both adjectives are at play, but the LP is at its best when you don't rightly know which one it is that you're feeling, or, as Dolphy puts it in the same interview, "It swings so much I don't know what to do… it moves me so much."

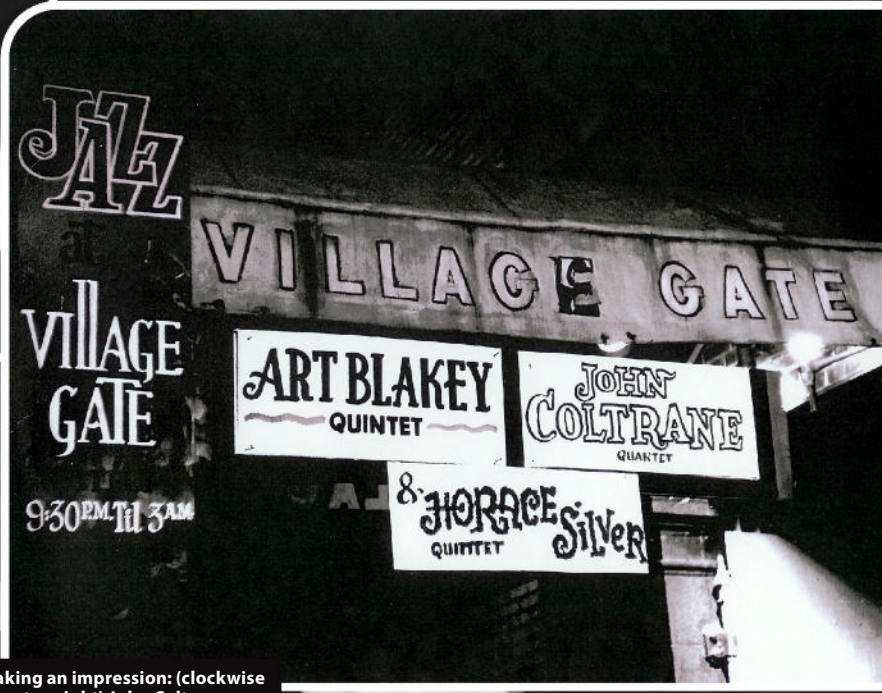


"Coltrane was trying to play in a way to invoke notions of anarchy."

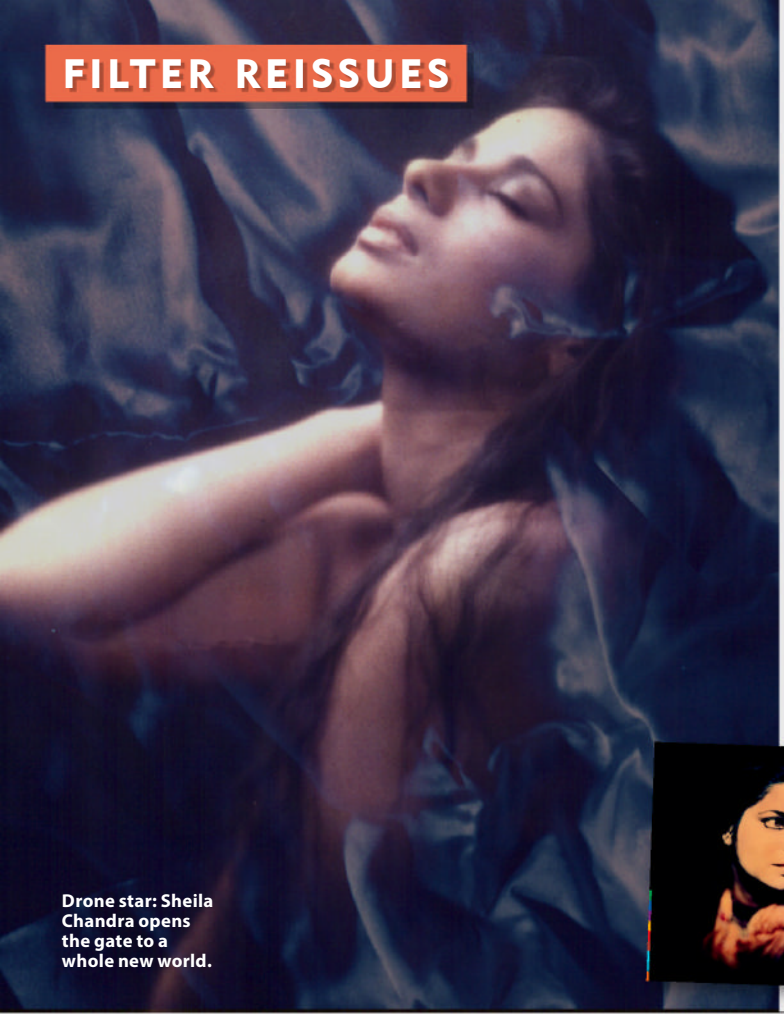
Herb Snitzer (6)

BACK STORY:
DESK JOB

● The recordings on this album were captured as an afterthought by the Village Gate's house soundman Rich Alderson as a way of testing out the club's new sound system. "I wanted to know how the system sounded in the room," Alderson explains in the liners. "Even without any mixing you can hear Coltrane and the drums very well, and also piano, bass, and Dolphy. It's also got a nice room sound, with all the people and applause. I can see that basement room in this recording, and the power of that group, especially Elvin Jones, the greatest jazz drummer I ever knew. I'm grateful that these tapes were found and I'm happy I recorded them. That summer, Coltrane sounded amazing."



Making an impression: (clockwise from top right) John Coltrane (left) and Eric Dolphy during a practice session before recording *…Village Gate* in summer 1961; the venue's exterior; a thoughtful Coltrane; the band in full swing; John and Eric all smiles; the genesis of free jazz: Dolphy (left) and Coltrane seek out the magnificent and the unknown.



Drone star: Sheila Chandra opens the gate to a whole new world.

Sheila Chandra

★★★★

ABoneCroneDrone

REAL WORLD. CD/DL/LP

High-water mark experimentalism from former Grange Hill star.

CHANDRA'S CAREER has been of Scott Walker-like progressions: from teenage actress to pop vocalist with Monsoon; in the 1990s, she released a trio of albums (*Weaving My Ancestors' Voices* and *The Zen Kiss* are also reissued) that marked her out as a sui generis star in the making. Initially she combined Konnakol, the Indian art of vocal percussion, with electronics and created links with English and Celtic folk – you can hear a lot of unexpected things mixed in and making perfect sense. By the third LP, 1996's *ABoneCroneDrone*, Chandra was foregrounding layer upon layer of vocal drone, hiding details in plain sight and letting your ears play tricks on you. Chandra's singing career had the cruellest of ends: now a writer, she has been left effectively mute by burning mouth syndrome, but this is a wonderful listening experience, a gateway to a whole new world.

David Hutcheon

Nick Lowe

★★★★

Dig My Mood

YEP ROC. CD/DL/LP

Turning 25, a mature masterpiece of the songsmith's art.

Midlife men often try to rewind the clock, but in his forties, Nick Lowe forsook fraying youth for the sober application of all he'd learned in singing, songwriting and making records, this being the second in a mature trilogy of classic albums. Unlike early disciple Elvis Costello a believer in less is more, this maestro of wry economy makes space for every word and lick to resonate with untold feeling, his voice a fine-grained croon *à la* Charlie Rich or Brook Benton. Whether small-hours torch or old-school country-pop, all 12 songs are jewels, beautifully played and recorded, highlights including the subtly trip-hop Faithless Lover, the seductive Freezing and swellingly melodic High On A Hill Top. This 25th anniversary reissue includes a witty, hitherto unreleased 13th, I'll Give You All Night To Stop, plus four live crowd-pleasers.

Mat Snow

Sheila Rock

Charlotte Greig

★★★★

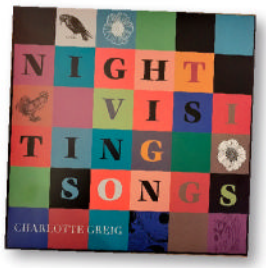
Night Visiting Songs

HARMONIUM MUSIC. DL/LP

Debut 1998 album from the late folk singer, novelist and sometime MOJO contributor.

When Charlotte Greig released this, her first LP, in 1998 she was 43 years old and had already lived a lifetime in music. Schooled in piano and folk song at Suffolk's famous Akenfield School, she'd performed in short-lived outfits with members of Gong and Weekend and as part of vocal trio Folk City Sisters, inspired by such uncompromising female singers as Anne Briggs, Shirley Collins and Lal Waterson. Recorded in her bedroom at night, her delicate, close-miked vocals accompanied by foggy harmonium, mountain dulcimer and Dr Rhythm drum machine, *Night Visiting Songs* is both lamentation and conjuration, bringing together 10 spectral compositions (four traditional, six original) concerned with late-night visitations of lovers and ghosts. Hushed, erotic and bewitching, these gothic aubades suggest a cloistered convent-schooled Nico nervously casting spells on all who listen. Greig is no longer with us, but her dark, beautiful spirit is present throughout this haunted nocturnal suite.

Andrew Male



Mystic Chords Of Memory

★★★★

Mystic Chords Of Memory

BIG POTATO. LP

Twentieth anniversary vinyl version of collaboration between Beachwood Sparks singer Chris Gunst and The Aislers Set's Jen Cohen.

Taking their name from a phrase in Abraham Lincoln's inaugural speech, in 2004 the Mystic Chords Of Memory convened to make their only album in the home they shared. Two years on, the collaborators collaborated with DJ Nobody on *Tree Colored See* and that was very much that. Singular and out of time when it first appeared, little has changed all these years on. There's a scratchy DIY feel, but it doesn't sound amateurish. Instead, with Cohen a ghostly vocal presence, these spartan but complex songs – almost a stripped-down Beachwood Sparks – benefited from the stark setting which allowed Gunst room to roam on the spacious, twangsome Sure, Bert and the more hypnotic, Jeff Buckley-ish (with added rainforest effects) Like A Lobster. Meanwhile, the near-instrumental Eyes On Sides Of Heads is both out there and toe-tapping, and the duet Open End is loveliness itself. A delightful curveball.

John Aizlewood

Fela Ransome Kuti & The Africa 70

★★★★

Gentleman

PARTISAN. LP

Innovative Afrobeat-incubating album originally issued on EMI, Nigeria.

1973's *Gentleman* began a decade of unprecedented creativity for Kuti, and captures him and Africa 70 pushing forward towards Afrobeat but not quite there yet. The 14-minute title track, though, is the starting point, with abstract, freeing tenor sax soloing and its soon-to-become signature syncopated beat leading into an utterly gleeful and seditionary vocal call and response. Kuti takes aim at those who adopt the post-colonial imposition of Western culture with a weaponised wit and a defiant clenched fist declaration: "I no be gentleman at all-o/ I be Africa Man original". The other two tracks, Fe Fe Ne Eye Fe and Igbe (Na Shit), are jazzy improvs, but equally gripping, the first based around an Ashanti proverb from Ghana, while the second's title literally translates as 'shit'.

Lois Wilson

Joy

★★★★

Joy

CADILLAC. CD/DL/LP

Welcome reissue of multi-national London-based jazz quintet's 1976 debut.

The first and sadly only album by this aptly-named ensemble stands in a similar relation to British jazz history as the bulkier *oeuvre* of Cymande does to homegrown funk and hip-hop. It's both a prophetic outlier and a well to be drawn upon, eschewing the fashion of the moment (in Joy's case, fusion) in a way that somehow seals in the freshness of the music. So anyone looking for parallels to the brilliantly organised drums of Keith Bailey or the geometric piano of Frank Roberts are as likely to find them in the recent annals of Brownswood or International Anthem as in Joy's own now distant epoch. Check the emergence of Spirals from Do You Know The Way at the end of side one if you want to know what the gear change on a magic carpet feels like.

Ben Thompson

The Tony Williams Lifetime

★★★★★

Emergency!

BE WITH. LP

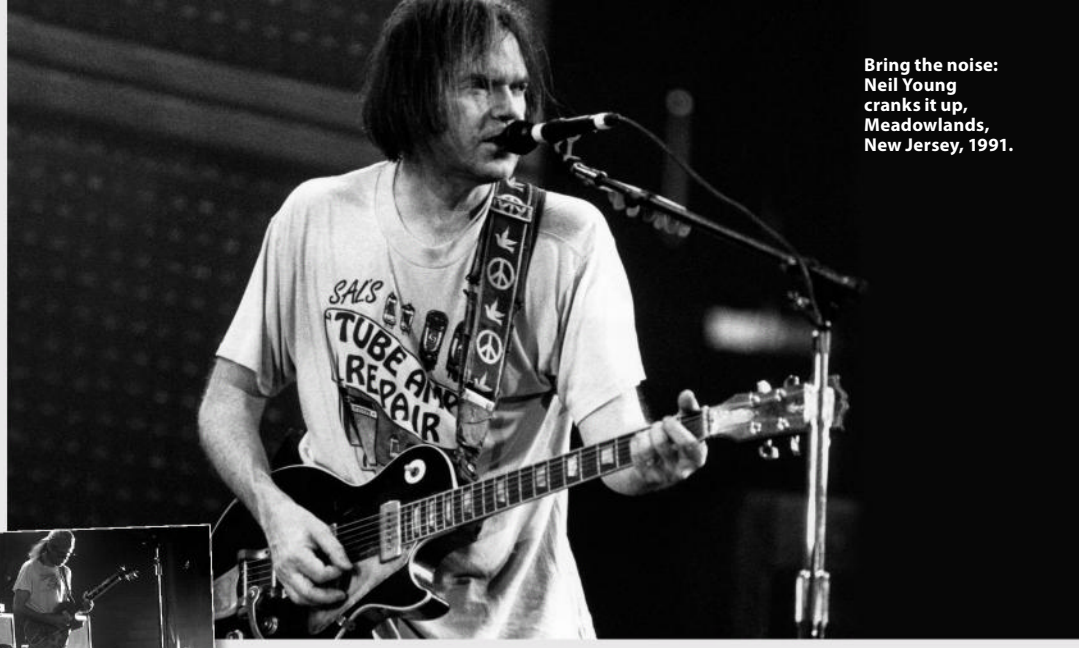
Power-trio electric jazz has never sounded heavier.

Recorded in spring 1969, following Williams' departure from Miles Davis's Second Great Quintet, when the Chicago jazz drummer was still just 23, *Emergency!* is the sprawling sound of freedom, revolution, necessity, and chaos. A supercharged take on late-'60s post-bop, with the added urgency of a modern rock trio, *Emergency!* melds Williams' propulsive drumming with John McLaughlin's jagged Gibson Les Paul intricacies and Larry Young's organ distortions, Monte Kay and Jack Lewis's raw production allowing each musician to ride over and under the mix in a manner both joyous and dangerous. If Williams' languid vocals add an eerie insouciant swagger to the aural onslaught, nothing dulls this LP's fraught power. Fifty-four years after its conception, *Emergency!* remains immediate, urgent and futuristic. The sound of yesterday's tomorrow, now!

Andrew Male

Dig the pony!

Freedom, Ragged Glory, Weld, Arc – and a little more. By John Mulvey.



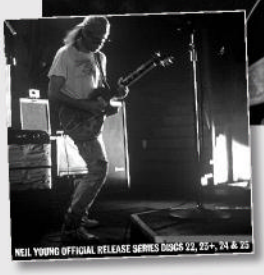
Bring the noise: Neil Young cranks it up, Meadowlands, New Jersey, 1991.

Neil Young

★★★★

Official Release Series Volume 5

REPRISE. CD/LP



"DON QUIGRUNGIO," Neil Young renamed himself, talking to NME's Gavin Martin in November 1992. In London ostensibly to promote the hushed *Harvest Moon*, Young also found himself reflecting on the significantly noisier phase just passed: an intense three years in which Young had reconnected with his ur-rocker side, recalled Crazy Horse, and struck a chord with a new generation of plaid-wearing guitar heroes. "At a point with *Arc* I said, OK, we're off and we're flying, this is distorted and grunged out to the max," he remembered. "Everything was great."

It's this exceptional phase of an exceptional, if not always consistent, career that is the focus of the latest hefty product off the Neil Young Archives conveyor belt. For those of you keeping track, it's a curious one: the "Official Release Series" strand has previously featured straight, remastered versions of Neil albums, with no extras or unreleased material. That's the case with three-quarters of *Volume 5*: 1989's rapprochement with rock, *Freedom*; one of his best live albums, 1991's Crazy Horse-rampant *Weld*; and *Weld*'s avant-feedback coda/collage, *Arc*.

1990's *Ragged Glory*, though, comes with four extra tracks, and an expanded name: *Ragged Glory – Smell The Horse*. It isn't quite the 'Ragged Glory II' that Young promised in 2018, with 38 minutes of unheard music. Instead we get a couple of previously-released B-sides from the sessions, notably the goofy paean to barnyard sex, Don't Spook The Horse, where Crazy Horse slope into one of their wonderfully clunky approximations of country.

The other two bonus tracks are unreleased, though you might know the songs. Boxcar seems to have been kicking about in the Young repertoire since 1985's *Old Ways*, before finally entering the public domain on 2007's *Chrome Dreams II*: this 1990 version favours strafed electric guitar rather than banjo for its hobo-folk elegy, and has the edge. It's Born To Run, though, that's the biggest find. One of those fabled Young rarities, it turned up on the *Archives II* box set as a three-minute cranker from the *Zuma* sessions in 1975. Here, it epitomises the Crazy Horse M.O. circa *Ragged Glory*: when they get in the zone, why get out of it?

Born To Run stomps on for over 12 minutes, a spectacular locked groove over which Young starts the keening, wrought-iron feedback solos from 2:05. Alongside the versions of Love To Burn and Love And Only Love on both *Ragged Glory* and *Weld*, the latter's imperial takes on Cortez The Killer and Like A Hurricane, the entire blasted whiteout of Arc, Born To Run demands a provocative question: has Young ever been so elegant and savage, so unfettered and experimental, in his guitar playing as he was during this period? One for the pub and social media arguments, perhaps. But in the meantime: can we have the other 22 minutes of unreleased music from the *Ragged Glory* sessions, please?

Ahmed Ben Ali

★★★★

Subhana

HABIBI FUNK. CD/DL/LP

Cratediggers' delight: obscure Libyan reggae from the mid-noughties.

According to the sleevenotes accompanying Benghazi-born singer/producer Ahmed Ben Ali's debut LP proper, a reggae scene began to flourish in Libya from the mid-'70s thanks to the popularity of "outernational" stars such as Marley and Tosh. Who knew? Fortunately, Berlin's consistently excellent Habibi Funk label did, discovering on YouTube then releasing the title track – a catchy, Auto-Tune-guided roots rocker – back in 2020, and cherry-picking the rest of this alluring LP from cassettes made by Ben Ali in his Benghazi home studio from 2005-08. Standouts include Damek Majeb and Ya Ghalian, where the blend of Zimzamet folkloric rhythms, JA-style toasting coupled with Middle Eastern vocal repetition, both underpinned by muscular, digitalised reggae grooves, is a revelation. Elsewhere, authentic yard vibes abound on dancehall anthem Ya Rait while bass-heavy rumble Ya Ta Ebha exudes real dread, making *Subhana* a genuinely unexpected and fascinating reggae curio.

Simon McEwen

Various

★★★★

Playing For The Man At The Door: Field Recordings From The Collection Of Mack McCormick, 1958-71

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS. CD/DL/LP

Long ballyhooed but rarely heard, Mack McCormick's archive begins to arrive.

This excellent set of 66 recordings by the late Mack McCormick – folklorist, writer, curator, and troubled Javert of Robert Johnson's ghost – will probably not revolutionise anyone's understanding of music, like *Sounds Of The South* or the *Anthology Of American Folk Music*. But these documents from McCormick's "Greater Texas" will both fill informational gaps and open new avenues of inquiry about the broader folk and blues landscape of the US after World War II. Produced by researchers Jeff Place and John W. Troutman, these tracks give a brilliant sense of scene, with crowd noise left intact. Familiar aces like Mance Lipscomb and Lightnin' Hopkins share space with the unknown moans of R.C. Forest and strong spirits of Billy Bizor. The real discovery here is George "Bongo Joe" Coleman, an itinerant Texan who improvised lyrical rants over steel drums on the Gulf Coast. In McCormick, perhaps his broader rediscovery awaits.

Grayson Haver Currin

The Observer All Stars & King Tubbys

★★★

Dubbing With The Observer

DOCTOR BIRD. CD

Praiseworthy 1975 dub LP, now with extra bonus dubs.

The first dub LP released by Niney The Observer, *Dubbing With The Observer* was mixed by King Tubby with an emphasis on drums, bass and horns, the subtle addition of reverb and judicious use of a high-pass filter allowing the listener to better appreciate backing band Soul Syndicate. Favourites such as Ken Boothe's Silver Words and Delroy Wilson's take of Rodriguez's Half Way Up The Stairs are expertly deconstructed, the latter emphasising spongy piano chords and a guitar hook, while the pounding drums of Sang Hugh's Rasta No Born Yah have a Sensurround dimension. Dubs of various Dennis Brown hits are especially compelling, and the singer's output is further mined on several bonus dubs, along with drum-and-bass mixes of singles by Gregory Isaacs, Cornell Campbell and more, though a few songs suffer from minor vinyl transfer issues.

David Katz

Mike Cooper

★★★

Life & Death In Paradise + Milan Live Acoustic 2018

PARADISE OF BACHELORS. CD/DL/LP

1974 album, plus recent-ish solo concert.

Frustrated by three rather unsuccessful early-'70s LPs, Mike Cooper retired to work in Andalusia as an odd-jobs man. Seduced by a new label and the prospect of working with both his usual team of crack South Africans and Terry Clarke, Cooper returned to London to record the warped singer-songwriterly *Life & Death In Paradise*. The results were acid lyrics, freeflowing playing and a takedown of the Rocky Horror Picture Show on Black Night Crash (Horry Rocker Show). It wasn't a success, but its musical adventurism heralded Cooper's 40 years as a titan of British improvised music and cut-up specialist. Decades later, the solo *Milan Live Acoustic* flirted with convention, but owed much to John Martyn as it mixed voice, improvised guitar and electronics across originals, plus the traditional Lord Franklin.

John Aizlewood

Ebet Roberts/Getty

Lost and found: Lewis Taylor, skilled and eccentric.

Lewis Taylor

★★★★

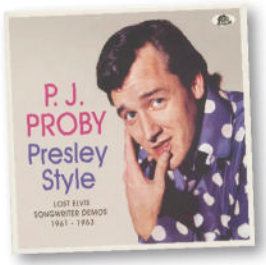
The Lost Album

BE WITH. LP

At last, vinyl editions for a languishing classic and its siblings.

THIS GREAT British musical polymath's complete works (including *The Damn Rest*, a compelling comp of early A-grade B-sides) have – hoorah! – been lovingly presented on vinyl for the first time. 2000's *Lewis II* feels more urgent and ageless than it used to, for some reason. 2022's *Numb* remains quietly devastating. The four discs of early-21st century soul-pop gathered as *Stoned (Pts 1 & 2)* contain many good things. The pick of the bunch, however, is this, the rejected 1998 follow-up to Taylor's amazing self-titled, psych-soul debut, where he switches lanes to pursue a deep love of West Coast harmony rock. As skilled and eccentric as prime Todd Rundgren (The Leader Of The Band, See My Way segueing into astonishing climax One More Mystery), with moments that feel like Brian Wilson channelling Crosby, Stills & Nash or vice versa (Let's Hope Nobody Finds Us, Send Me An Angel), it's an end-to-end delight.

Jim Irvin



Paul Rider

P.J. Proby

★★★★

Presley Style – Lost Elvis Songwriter Demos 1961-1963

BEAR FAMILY. CD

Well-curated set of previously unissued demos aimed at the King.

In the early 1960s, a pre-fame P.J. Proby had a sideline earning $10 a shot singing demos at Radio Recorders in LA for songwriters pitching for slots in Elvis movies. "The songs were all sprung on me," he recalls, "but it didn't matter to me, knowing that I was singing for Elvis and I knew how to approach them." Competition for soundtrack slots was fierce, and the tracks here feature top session players like Hal Blaine or Leon Russell. The final decision was Presley's – some made the cut, many did not, like the fine rockers Take Me To The Fair (intended for It Happened At The World's Fair) or Everything I Need (written for Roustabout). Proby is in excellent form throughout, and on Where Is Pappy? even throws in some spirited dog howling. An entertaining insight into how Elvis songs wound up on-screen.

Max Décharné

Barney Kessel

★★★★

Honey Rock: The Barney Kessel Story 1954-1962

JASMINE. CD/DL

The jazz guitar giant at his swingin' peak.

A devotee of bebop guitar master Charlie Christian, fellow Oklahoman Barney Kessel revolutionised jazz guitar, creating novel intricate chord phrasing coupled with soulful single-string blue notes. As a member of the legendary Wrecking Crew, session work paid the bills. (That's him on *Pet Sounds*, among other pop classics.) Left to his own devices, he was a jazz man and this 2-CD set collects his solo work, primarily for the Contemporary label. In addition to standards like Love Is Here To Stay, Indiana and April In Paris that show off his peerless swinging, there's his novelty hit Honey Rock and his perfect accompaniment to sultry chanteuse Julie London on Cry Me A River. But when Kessel cut loose on tracks like Swingin' The Toreador, the blur of his blinding fast runs was truly spectacular.

Michael Simmons

Minhwi Lee

★★★★

Borrowed Tongue

ALIEN TRANSISTOR. DL/LP

Vinyl debut for Korean's dream-folk beauty.

'Alternative' Korea has made inroads abroad – Jambinai's explosive post-rock, for example – but not yet this exquisite example from the opposite end of the spectrum. Everything about *Borrowed Tongue*'s half-hour is small-scale perfection; Lee's floating presence, arrangements that underplay an array of trumpet, flute, strings, synth, guitar and bass, and just six vocal tracks bookended by two filmic instrumentals: Stone-Throwing (imagine walking in a deserted city at twilight) and The Light Of Silence (the same scene but under moonlight). The becalmed mood extends to Swollen Foot, opening with crashing waves, and Dream's mix of wordless crooning and indecipherable whispers, as seductive and feverish as Wicker Man favourite Willow Song. Broken Mirror and Dictée's sudden shift into pulsing, blissful pop, and the jarring album cover (a butcher cutting a huge slab of meat) only add to the mystery of Lee's ambitions.

Martin Aston

Fuchsia

★★★★

Fuchsia

GUERSSEN. LP

Overdue remastered reissue of UK prog-folk classic.

Formed at Exeter University by UFO/Middle Earth habitué Tony Durant, Fuchsia were as unlikely a line-up as one could hope to meet on the late-'60s UK folk-rock scene, an underground singer-songwriter augmented by drummer Michael Gregory, bassist Michael Day (fine so far) and the classically-trained string trio of Madeleine Bland, Janet Rogers and Vanessa Hall-Smith. Named after the gauchely beautiful Fuchsia Groan in Mervyn Peake's gothic, post-war Gormenghast trilogy, this unlikely sextet eschewed normal pop-folk formats, creating what might best be described as baroque prog-folk romanticism. As captured on their sole LP, recorded at Sound Techniques with Caravan/Mellow Candle producer David Hitchcock, theirs is a sound that melds classical discordancy with lush chamber-folk arrangements and country-folk rhythms, while the union of Durant's bookish gothic lyrics with the haunted female harmonies of Rogers, Hall-Smith and Bland possesses an almost proto-shoegaze ethereality.

Andrew Male

John Lee Hooker

★★★★

Alone: Live At Hunter College 1976

BMG. LP

Two stripped back acoustic solo sets from 1976, originally issued in 1989.

John Lee Hooker, at New York's Hunter College on February 6, 1976, just him on-stage, on a stool, with his guitar and a mike and the tapes rolling. The intimacy is palpable, the hall becoming an impromptu living room as the blues legend takes those signature songs of his – One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer; Boom Boom; Boogie Chillun etc – and delivers them as if in the company of old friends. There's a little bit of chat, but then the playing: *sans* band, he's rhythmically free, bending notes and utilising space and summoning past, present and future in the raw and abstract sounds he creates. Not only one of Hooker's greatest live outings, but one of the all-time great live albums too.

Lois Wilson

Del Jones

★★★★

Court Is Closed

NOW-AGAIN. DL/LP

Three-LP package featuring 1973 debut, the same year's *Positive Vibes* plus a disc of rarities and rehearsals.

With touchstones Gil Scott-Heron and Amiri Baraka, West Philadelphia's Del Jones used his psych-funk spoken-word collective to document injustice and inequality. Honed at Philly's African Tea Room and The Church Of The Advocate, his dispatches from black America's frontline landed him the sobriquet 'the war correspondent'. His '73 debut pulses with a poetic, percussive energy but limited to a run of only 500 copies, it went largely unnoticed. When he then added brass overdubs – arranged by his uncle, the jazz trumpeter Herbie Jones – and reissued it as *Positive Vibes*, it reached a bigger audience and became a cult classic. Both versions are here, with a third disc that rounds up singles and rehearsal tapes including the previously unheard Attica, another sage and savage message of resistance that still resonates 50 years on.

Lois Wilson

Primal Scream

★★★★

Reverberations (Travelling In Time)

YOUNG TIKI. CD/DL/LP

The OG Scream's jangle-pop homages are refreshing and mostly unreleased.

A time of performative innocence in alternative UK pop and for Mk 1 Primal Scream, before line-up changes, acid house and harder drugs kicked in (in the package's accompanying photos, future wildman Robert 'Throb' Young looks like cocaine wouldn't melt in his mouth) and long before the passing of keyboard maestro Martin Duffy and its sour aftermath. Defined by the mad treble of Jim Beattie's 12-string picking and Bobby Gillespie's fey tones, these 1985 recordings cram in the mid-'60s touchstones: in an early stab at Imperial, Tom McGurk makes a fair go of the Tomorrow Never Knows drum part; of songs that never made it to the Scream's *Sonic Flower Groove* debut album, a BBC session version of Feverclaw is a perky Byrdsian jangle. But the aftermath of punk is felt in every track's bite: especially the timelessly curt 1:25 of Velocity Girl and proto-My Bloody Valentine of instrumental Spirea X.

Danny Eccleston

Brian May + Friends

★★★

Star Fleet Project: 40th Anniversary Edition

EMI/UME. CD/LP

A much-expanded box set of May's Japanese kids' show-inspired solo flight.

A spontaneous blast with heavy friends including Eddie Van Halen, 1983's *Star Fleet Project* was tracked for kicks then released as a three-tune mini-album, but here are those Record Plant, LA sessions in their entirety. Fun to hear the playful, sci-fi-kitsch title track composed by Paul Bliss take shape over 10 takes, but Macca conjuring Get Back from the ether this isn't, quite – even if the interplay between May and Van Halen is sparky. Elsewhere, Let Me Out and Blues Breaker (inspired by John Mayall's Eric Clapton-featuring LP of almost the same name), see Brian and Eddie nod at their roots, new and period interviews flesh out the project's backstory, and we get live tracks recorded at LA's Palace Theater in 1993 *sans* Eddie. Archivally valid and beautifully packaged, certainly, but one for completists.

James McNair

Malcolm McLaren

★★★★

Duck Rock

THE STATE51 CONSPIRACY. LP

The arch-manipulator's 1983 sampling-plunder landmark, restored and expanded.

"A Sex Pistol that's what I am," goes township jiver Punk It Up. While there are those who consider Malcolm McLaren the swindler/embezzler/magpie who looted US punk and repackaged it via the Pistols, he clearly understood its unlimited promise, and applied it with phosphorescent glee on his solo debut. Aided by DJ crew the World's Famous Supreme Team, producer Trevor Horn and members of the soon-to-be Art Of Noise (note how World's Famous sounds like ABC's *Lexicon Of Love* in the Bronx), *Duck Rock* is an almost-radio play which collages oldest school hip-hop, African and Latin forms, Appalachian square dancing and competitive skipping, and if it was gobsmacking at the time – 1982 hit Buffalo Gals was, arguably, the UK's first exposure to breakdancing, graffiti and scratching – it remains a beautifully-executed example of the cut-and-paster's art. Of the bonus cuts, only a 2007 Franz Ferdinand mash-up sounds dated.

Ian Harrison

Jack DeJohnette

★★★★

Sorcery

CRAFT RECORDINGS. LP

Drummer/composer's spellbinding '74 psychedelic jazz-rock curio.

Noted for his highly nuanced, colouristic approach to drumming, Chicago-born DeJohnette has explored many different musical landscapes in his lengthy career, from straight-ahead jazz and electric fusion to free jazz and world music. In 1974's *Sorcery*, joined by fellow *Bitches Brew* alumni, clarinettist Bennie Maupin and bassist Dave Holland, together with guitarists John Abercrombie and Mick Goodrick, DeJohnette serves up a series of varied and arresting sound collages. They range from discursive jazz-rock grooves (Sorcery #1) to more audacious adventures in sound (The Right Time, an avant-garde experiment defined by a hubbub of spoken voices). The album's pièce de résistance is The Reverend King Suite, a six-part homage to Martin Luther King with DeJohnette playing the organ.

Charles Waring

Exile music: Tucker Zimmerman looks for peaceful vibes.

The French dispatch

First re-issue of the sonically ground-breaking third studio LP from the classically trained San Francisco singer-songwriter. By **Andrew Male**.

Tucker Zimmerman

★★★★

Over Here In Europe

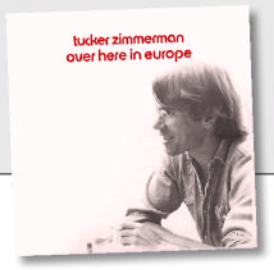
BIG POTATO. CD/DL/LP

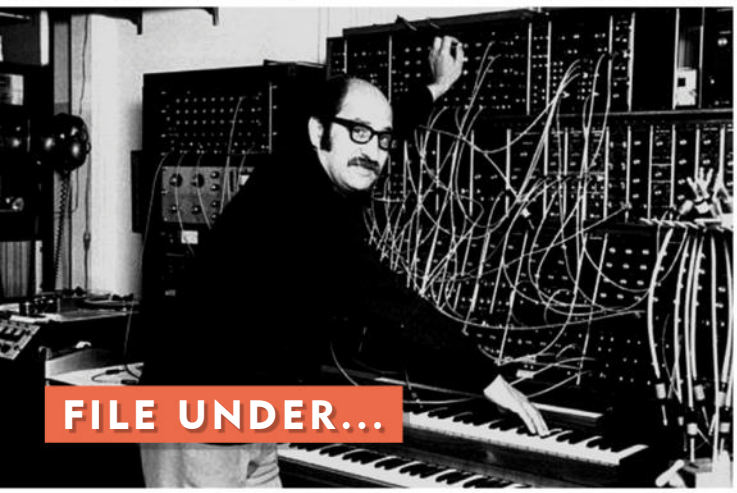
ANYONE WHO has read interviews with beloved US folk-rockers Big Thief in the past few years will know they are big fans of Tucker Zimmerman. The 82-year-old San Francisco-born folk singer appeared as a regular Big Thief support act during their 2022 tour and both frontwoman Adrianne Lenker and drummer James Krivchenia have cited Zimmerman, along with venerable freak-folkers Michael Hurley and Brian Cutean, as a significant influence on their maximal folk-rock eclecticism.

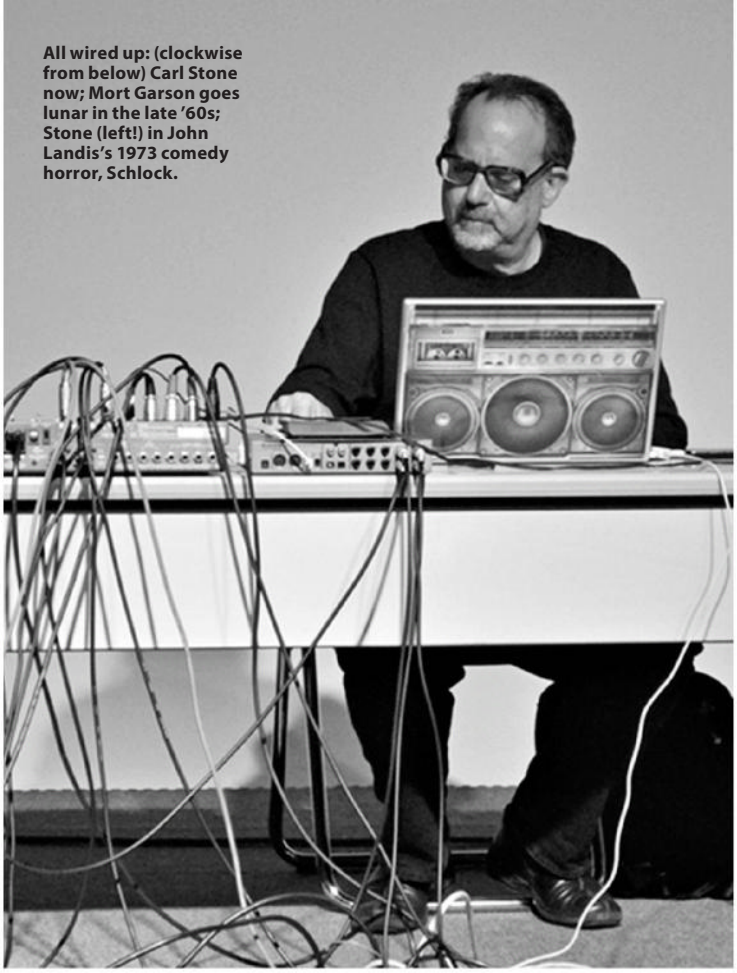
It's not the first time Zimmerman has had celebrity fans, however. In a 2003 issue of Vanity Fair, David Bowie cited Zimmerman's 1969 debut *Ten Songs*, produced by a young Tony Visconti, as amongst his 25 favourite albums of all time, dubbing it a set of "stern, angry and enthralling compositions" by an artist "way too qualified for folk". Somewhat awkwardly, *Ten Songs* does not make it into Zimmerman's own list of his favourite albums. The product of what happened when the young Zimmerman – a brilliant Fulbright Scholar – experienced "the full Gypsy-Communal-Hallucinogenic-Pre-Millennial Apocalyptic Earthquake" in mid-'60s Haight-Ashbury before escaping the draft and fleeing to Europe, *Ten Songs*' impassioned folk screeds and mystical, apocalyptic philippics were, insisted their author, far less interesting and significant than 1974's *Over Here In Europe*. He may have had a point.

Influenced by his new bucolic life in Belgium with his wife Marie Claire and young family, and invested with a fresh positivity, Zimmerman's new batch of songs were "positive messages with peaceful vibrations… little hums that might lift us all above our daily worries and fears".

Recorded in Paris, in an 8-track studio near the Gare de Lyon, here are tales of travellers and outcasts, love, family and countryside, Tucker's acoustic strumming, country slide guitar and optimistic falsetto enhanced by a warm, intimate production. However, this rustic simplicity is made deliciously strange by the warm electronic chimes of Zimmerman's Arp monophonic and the eerie modulations of an Ondes Martenot, played here by the French spectral composer Tristan Murail. At times, Zimmerman's voice, which exists somewhere in the curious Venn diagram of Gordon Lightfoot, Pete Seeger and Native American folk singer Willie Dunn, takes on its own spectral reediness. And on standout tracks such as the epic ballad of American settlers, Oregon (written for another Belgium-based American outcast, Derroll Adams), and the haunting Soldier Mountain Lookout – about avoiding the 1966 San Francisco riots by escaping to a fire lookout tower in Shasta County – Zimmerman conjures up a kind of Arcadian folk surrealism that is utterly his own.







All wired up: (clockwise from below) Carl Stone now; Mort Garson goes lunar in the late '60s; Stone (left!) in John Landis's 1973 comedy horror, Schlock.

FILE UNDER...

Oscillate wildly

Deconstructing pop's fabric or bleeping on TV, two electronic pioneers embraced the future with differing agendas. By Jim Irvin.

SOMETIME IN the early '70s, experimental composer Carl Stone was a graduate at CalArts tasked with transferring the university's library of 10,000 vinyl albums to tape, requiring him to dub many records at once on multiple systems. The resulting collisions of disparate musics came to fascinate him, and he sought ways to compose using those textures.

His first recordings, from 1972, which pre-dated the archiving gig, had employed drones and loops, single piano notes slowed down to ominous rumbles (Ryouund Thygizunz), and voices cut up into fragments. As he developed his ideas, he became interested in literally rearranging pre-existing pieces of music, what he called "anagramming", effectively creating live remixes using basic samplers and effects units. To recreate his '80s work live in the 2000s, he wrote his own program replicating the processing offered by the Publison DH89 harmonizer he'd used back then. That voyage, creating music from basic tape manipulation to custom-made audio software, can be traced on Carl Stone's *Electronic Music From 1972-2022* ★★★, a 3-LP set on Unseen Worlds.

If you're a fan of rock's dabblings with the avant-garde – *Faust*, *Metal Machine Music*, *No Pussyfooting* – you'll get it straight away. Using collage, echo and repetition, Stone fuses and abuses found sounds to elicit unexpected responses. "[His] work celebrates the power of *and*," declares liner writer Ed McKeon.

"There is always more, more and more, metabolised in ways that suggest further openings. Stone shatters songs to upend our expectations of what a song can be… joining audio slivers together or stretching a few seconds of sound into a quarter-hour moment."

McKeon cites Stone's 1992 collection, *Mom's*, as a prime influence on a group of outsider musicians in Boston; DJs, composers and noise-heads united in their admiration for his unconventional methods and aims. None of that album is here, but in 1987's Vim, Stone spins splinters of The Beach Boy's Fun Fun Fun into a delirious mantra, an approach that reaches some kind of apogee in 2005's Morangak, where he does the same thing to Queen's Bicycle Race, of all things, multiple simultaneous fragments, cycling in stuck grooves, weaving themselves into a hypnotic new noise.

In 2007, Stone started researching fresh ways of combining sounds in parallel that weren't simple mixes, coming up with a technique he likens to injection moulding. The 23-minute L'Os à Moelle, premiered live in 2008 at the NY Bard College Summerscape Festival, uses a little-known Byrds instrumental, Stranger In A Strange Land (a bonus track on the *Turn! Turn! Turn!* CD) as the "shell" into which he injects differing musical material; you hear voices that may not be there and hints of Beethoven's Fifth. Stone quotes a critic describing the disquieting result as like hearing a parasite slowly take over a host.

By comparison, the pioneering electronica of Mort Garson is candy floss, Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da to Stone's Revolution 9. Exposed early to the Moog synthesizer after meeting Robert Moog at a 1967 tech convention, Canadian composer and arranger Garson quickly incorporated the device into his work, initially played by Paul Beaver, on their famous *Cosmic Sounds* LP as The Zodiac. A couple of years later, Garson's synth compositions were soundtracking the moon landings.

"Stone spins splinters of Beach Boys into a delirious mantra."

The man behind pop hits such as Our Day Will Come by Ruby & The Romantics, Garson released tracks under many aliases. A new, beautifully packaged compilation, *Journey To The Moon And Beyond* ★★★ (Sacred Bones) collects the moon music with some library stuff, TV idents and stray singles, showcasing several aspects of Garson's synth use, some tangential – background fizz on brilliant funk single See The Cheetah – some total – the Moog's signature sad/sinister tone audible on Love Is A Garden – some silly – the rock'n'roll miaowing of Cat Boogie.

Garson deserves a deeper overview of his intriguing output. This is a little bit scrappy but makes an attractive companion to the recently reissued *Mother Earth's Plantasia*.

Tomohiro Ueshiba, CS Lauburu

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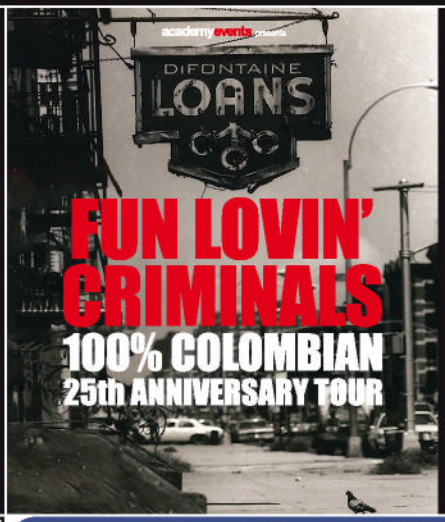

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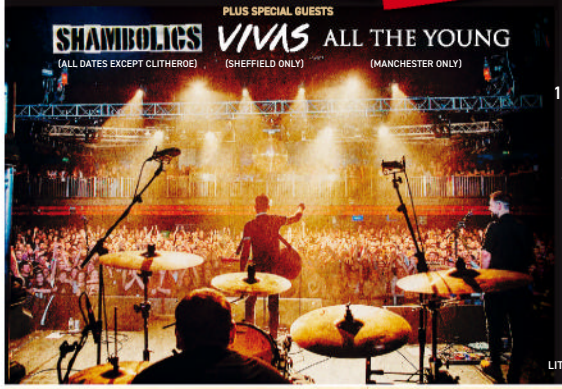

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13 **MANCHESTER** O2 RITZ
14 **CLITHEROE** THE GRAND
15 **GLASGOW** THE GARAGE
18 **SOUTHAMPTON** ENGINE ROOMS
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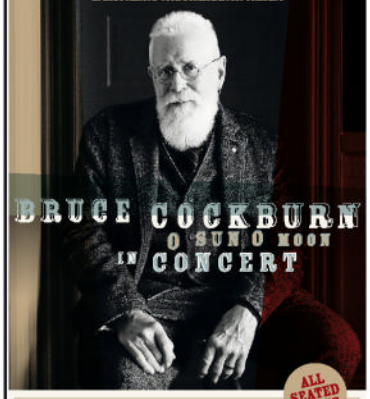

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Lord of the strings: *Mindbender* creator Barry Forgie in 1972.

Courtesy of Barry Forgie

Enter The Psych Library

This month's slept-on sensation: hypnagogic funky cues for string quartet and band.

Stringtronics
Mindbender

PEER INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY LTD, 1972

AS MUSICAL DIRECTOR of the BBC Big Band, Barry Forgie worked on jazz presentations with names including Tony Bennett, Dr. John and Amy Winehouse. In the early '70s, though, he was engaged in the shadow realm of commercial library music – the genre-hopping, off-the-peg background sounds for film, TV and ads which aficionado Jerry Dammers called, "a super genre all of its own… a sort of underworld where the record-buying public or critics wouldn't dream of venturing."

A case in point: 1972's bewitching six-song suite *Mindbender*, made in a day by crack session pros to realise Forgie's vision of strings in rhythm. The fact that six more songs by other people were bolted on the end is somewhat confusing, but such was the nature of the library music beast.

Born in Peterborough in 1939, Forgie was a precocious composer who played trombone in Salvation Army bands and jazz groups. After studying music in Cardiff, he taught in Croydon by day and played the London big band circuit by night. After being tutored by composer Ken Thorne (whose screen credits included Help!, The Monkees' Head and The Magic Christian), he moved into arranging for bands and orchestras in 1967. "I came into the profession, into the studio scene, as a copyist and doing odd bits for people," says Forgie today.

He also led his own Barry Forgie Band, one of whose BBC broadcasts was heard by publisher Dennis Berry of the Denmark Street-based Peer International Library Ltd. label. Berry duly got in touch to suggest he write some library music. After he'd done "a few" Forgie came back with a suggestion.

"I wanted to do something completely different," he says. "I said to Dennis, I've just got this idea of doing original stuff with a string quartet and rhythm section, but not drums. Peer International had sumptuous string things, but they didn't have what I was thinking of, which was sort of jazz-rock with a string quartet being the featured sound. What normally happened in those days was, Dennis would ask you to do an album along particular lines, but in this case, it was all what I wanted to do, and he was very good and went along with it."

One afternoon in 1972 – Forgie can't recall the time of year – he went into Lansdowne studios in Ladbroke Grove with string player Tony Gilbert and the players dubbed the Lansdowne Quartet. "I don't know whether he just made the name up on the day, and I'm afraid I can't remember their names," says Forgie, who selected the remaining musicians from the session scene.

"You didn't have rehearsals outside the studio or music sent ahead or anything like that," he recalls. "It was live, a three-hour session with a 15-minute break, not a lot of time when it's completely new music, and also some of it quite involved. But it was very enjoyable. We did put on these little echo effects in the mixing session but there are no overdubs."

The six Forgie-penned songs they recorded impart rare and intoxicating moods, from the dramatic yet debonair chase of the title song to the chloroformed castanets of Mediterranée, but always with a secure rhythmic pulse and strings that swell and retreat as if proffering some hidden prize. A certain real-leather texture redolent of the early '70s predominates, but the pieces aren't shy of ambivalent emotional spaces: Hunted occupies a similar zone of groovy perilousness as Roy Budd's Get Carter theme, with electric piano and dub effects, while Catharsis's baroque tension-theme adds viscous blues guitar (the song's sense of nervous strain may be due to the musicians having to finish it in a hurry). The last piece, Dawn Mists, is an exquisite, shimmering drift into somewhere beyond: a cratedigger's pick, it was sampled by Madlib on his 2004 track Falling. Some commentators have detected the influence of David Axelrod and Ennio Morricone: Forgie says not, but does admit to his admiration for Quincy Jones.

In order to make up an album suitable for industry expectations, Berry added six songs by library music regulars Nino Nardini, Roger Roger and Anthony Mawer, which sonically relate to what went before while lacking the same impact. "I won't comment on those," says Forgie with a chuckle. "I think I felt at the time, well, if Dennis liked it that much, why didn't he come back to me and ask me to do another six? I would have been really happy to do it. But, I wasn't bothered about it."

Forgie says *Mindbender* didn't do great business as a source for cues for the screen, and by 1977 he had left the library world for the BBC Big Band, where he continues his life in music. "I still do odd things and I still like writing," he says. Would he, 51 years on, do those extra six songs for *Mindbender*? "It'd be fun to do," he says. "It's only a string quartet and a rhythm section… but someone's got to pay for it."

He adds he's "bemused" at its continuing popularity among fans of hidden music, "but I'm quite happy with it. I worked a lot with [the other players] and even now we'll talk about it, Do you remember when we went to Lansdowne and did that? We thought it was just another library session, might make money, might not, but it seems to have sort of struck a chord. Sometimes you get the chance to do something that is both commercially viable and also musically viable. In that sense, it was special."

Ian Harrison

Barry Forgie conducts the BBC Big Band, with special guests Claire Martin and Iain Mackenzie, at the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre on September 3.

CREDITS

Tracks: Mindbender/ Mediterranée/ Ballata/Hunted/ Catharsis/Dawn Mists (By Barry Forgie)/Undercover Girl/Freedom Road (by Anthony Mawer)/ Afro-Samba/ Tropicola (by Nino Nardini)/Safari Park/ Perdition (by Roger Roger)

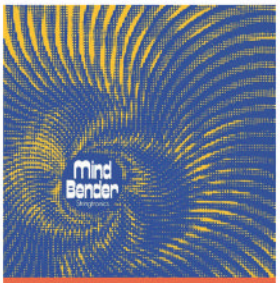
Personnel: Barry Forgie (composer, arranger, musical director)/Tony Gilbert (strings)/ Dave Richmond (bass guitar)/Brian Dee (piano)/Clive Hicks (guitars, balalaika)/ Jim Lawless (percussion)/The Lansdowne Quartet (strings)

Producer: Dennis Berry

Released: 1972

Recorded: Lansdowne Studios, London

Current availability: Vadim reissue, 2010



"It was live, a three-hour session with a 15-minute break…"
BARRY FORGIE

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Here's to you: Mr Smokey Robinson, creator of miracles.

Smokey Robinson

He's America's greatest living poet you know. By Andrew Male.

BOB DYLAN did not call Smokey Robinson "America's greatest living poet". Nope. Al Abrams, Motown's top PR man, did that. As he explained in his 2011 memoir, Hype & Soul, "I [asked] Al Aronowitz, Dylan's biographer, if he'd get a quote from Dylan saying, 'Smokey Robinson is America's greatest living poet'. Al said, 'Why bother? That sounds like something he'd say. If Bob sees it in print he's never going to deny it.'"

But people believe it to this day, and regularly reprint the quote, perhaps because it has emotional truth. It needs to be true. Even Smokey believes it. "Bob said it. He and I have talked about it," he told US journalist Vladimir Lyubovny recently. And what better than 'a lie that became a truth' to describe the lyricism of Robinson, because it sounds like a Smokey lyric, the kind he's been writing since 1957 as the lead singer of The Miracles, as Motown staff writer and producer until 1966, and as a solo artist for the past 50 years – his most recent LP, *Gasms*, came out this April.

Working solo or alongside Motown boss Berry Gordy, Miracles guitarist Marv Tarplin or Claudette Robinson (his wife and fellow Miracles member), this Detroit teenager developed a lyrical style that was simultaneously vernacular and baroque; taking clichés, truisms and conversational phrases and working them into complete extended narratives, stretching the central idea and embellishing it with secondary rhymes, cute melodic replies and parenthetic asides. As a staff writer, Robinson often tailored his songs for the artist he was writing for; unique phrasings suited to individual singers in The Temptations; words with a tough rhythmic precision for Marvin Gaye. But for himself and The Miracles he specialised in songs with a subtle harmonic purity suited to his sweet, delicate falsetto, songs rich in mood and expression that were often about deceptive emotions or appearances, or people who hide away or disappear. Robinson's LPs, both in The Miracles and as a solo artist, have a similar subtle deceptiveness. The Miracles' albums hide quiet masterpieces behind the hits while the solo albums, no longer geared to radio time, are rich in mood, subtle in expression. They can seem effortless or even bland on first listen but you have to lie back and let them come to you.

Smokey Robinson has always been hailed as a singles artist, and those recommending his music will often steer you to a best-of compilation. That's one route. However, as Robinson himself has said, he always wrote within the time allotted to him, and to discover that he was a great longform albums artist as well as The Great American Poet of the Jukebox 45 has been one of the joys of compiling this How To Buy.

"Smokey's songs have a subtle harmonic purity… often about deceptive emotions."

CAST YOUR VOTES...

This month you chose your Top 10 Smokey Robinson LPs. Next month we want your Bee Gees Top 10. Send selections via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy Bee Gees' and we'll print the best comments.

10 Smokey Robinson

Where There's Smoke…

TAMLA, 1979

You say: "Cruelly overlooked these days, even the disco cover of Get Ready has a coked-up charm." Tina Wood, via e-mail

When originally released, Robinson's seventh solo album was hailed as his finest solo release. With 44 years' hindsight, it's maybe not that great but boy is it good. Six-minute disco-funk opener It's A Good Night perfectly captures the cocaine addiction that was beginning to define his life ("A good night for everything/ Except for you and me saying goodnight") while the more laid-back, late-night grooves of Hurt's On You, Share It and hit single Cruisin' are suffused with the easy, unassuming genius of Robinson at his lyrical best, where nothing is foregrounded but everything fits perfectly in its place.

4 Smokey Robinson

Smokey

TAMLA, 1973

You say: "Smokey aiming at a younger audience; a nice mix with social commentary in Just My Soul Responding." @AndyMack, via Twitter

Produced by Willie Hutch and co-written with Marv Tarplin, Robinson's debut solo LP is a lavish exercise in early-'70s soul, the lush late-Miracles sound blending with dancing flute rhythms, warm Rhodes chords, sweeping Philly strings and the wah wah guitar of Hutch's own Blaxploitation scores. Three covers (Never My Love, Never Can Say Goodbye and an admittedly gorgeous Will You Love Me Tomorrow) suggest a lack of new material but, elsewhere, Robinson mixes perennial themes such as public and private faces (Wanna Know My Mind) and him-or-me relationships (Silent Partner…) with politically conscious groovers such as Just My Soul Responding.

9 Smokey Robinson & The Miracles
Time Out For…

TAMLA, 1969

You say: Reclaims My Girl, adds some new hits and does a beautiful Wichita Lineman." @Pablo_S_ Alonso, via Twitter

Time Out For… is an LP gloriously, defiantly out of step, eschewing the label's in-vogue psychedelic soul sound in favour of a studio blueprint from three years earlier. Civil rights are addressed in their curious barber-shop cover of Dick Holler's Abraham, Martin And John and they make a fair fist of Jimmy Webb's Wichita Lineman, but the LP mainly succeeds with the classic R&B grooves of Dog-gone Right, Here I Go Again and the glorious Baby, Baby Don't Cry. CD copies come with bonus LP, *Four In Blue*, also from 1969, which features a great eerie version of Holland-Dozier-Holland's My World Is Empty Without You.

8 Smokey Robinson & The Miracles
What Love Has… Joined Together

TAMLA, 1970

You say: "I bought this LP for peanuts and forgot about it. Then after a few beers one night I discovered it again. What a find!" @darkred-birds, via Twitter

A concept LP about romantic union influenced by the long-form symphonic style of Isaac Hayes and Curtis Mayfield, this is a real lost gem. Taking songs by Stevie Wonder, Brenda Holloway, Bacharach & David, Marvin Gaye and Lennon & McCartney, Robinson (with exquisite help from arranger Jerry Long and guitarist Marv Tarplin) creates an LP of seamless, drifting euphoria. Highlights? An intoxicating version of This Guy's In Love With You where Smokey quotes I Heard It Through The Grapevine and the swirling, neo-gothic reworking of And I Love Her.

7 Smokey Robinson & The Miracles
One Dozen Roses

TAMLA, 1971

You say: "SR&TM were almost finished in '71 when *One Dozen Roses* pulled together tracks from the preceding five years. But there are plentiful delights here." @Birmingham_81, via Twitter

When a reissue of 1967 single The Tears Of A Clown reached Number 1 in the UK and US in 1970, Smokey was forced to abandon his solo career plans. Hurriedly released to capitalise on the success, *One Dozen Roses* may be a cobbled-together mishmash featuring an ungainly Tears remix but, in all other respects, it's a small wonder. Highlights include sweetly mournful opener When Sundown Comes, the melancholy No Wonder Love's A Wonder, and a pseudo-Philly reworking of The Hunter Gets Captured By The Game.

6 Smokey Robinson
Pure Smokey

TAMLA, 1974

You say: "Smokey's soundtrack for a great lost '70s Blaxploitation movie." Josh Amaru, via e-mail

With former Miracle Marv Tarplin returned to the fold as co-songwriter, Robinson's second post-Miracles LP references such contemporary sonic influences as ZZ Hill's cheatin' soul and Blaxploitation funk, whilst tinkering with the smooth mid-tempo sound that would come to define his next LP. Yet despite the laid-back vibe this is an emotionally heavy album. Beyond the somewhat controversial single, Virgin Man, about sexually inexperienced men who lie about their conquests, the themes are autobiographical. It's Her Turn To Live is dedicated to Robinson's elder sister who helped raise him after his mother died, while She's Only A Baby Herself references the pregnancy of his own 16-year-old daughter.

5 Smokey Robinson & The Miracles
Make It Happen

TAMLA, 1967

You say: "Such a satisfying album: great dancers, gorgeous ballads and my favourite Smokey vocal on the sublime …Just A Mirage." @bookworm_ north, via Twitter

This undoes the tired truism that '60s Motown LPs were merely a handful of singles and some filler. Admittedly, the singles here are all killer, including the beguiling The Love I Saw In You Was Just A Mirage, the earlier, superior version of The Tears Of A Clown and the effortlessly smooth More Love (written for Robinson's wife and fellow Miracle Claudette, after she suffered a miscarriage). But even the filler here is great with tracks like tight-buttoned dancer The Soulful Shack and a haunting, late-night cover of Little Anthony & The Imperials' I'm On The Outside (Looking In).

3 Smokey Robinson
Smokey's Family Robinson

TAMLA, 1976

You say: "Such a belter with that driving, unrelenting groove." @MatPringle, via Twitter

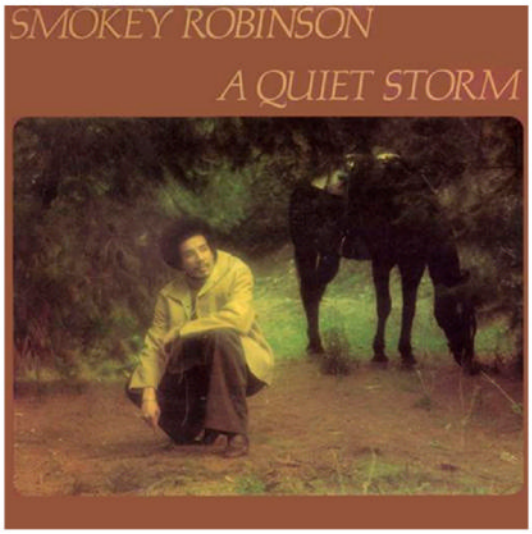
Packaged to give the impression he'd unveiled a new post-Miracles supergroup, this might be Robinson's most delightfully surprising LP of the '70s. Working closely with saxophonist Michael 'Jake' Jacobsen, and dispensing with his trademark strings and any regular verse-chorus-verse song structures, this is the sound of Smokey doing atmospheric funk-soul, in a similar vein to Marvin Gaye's *I Want You*, *The Heat Is On*-era Isley Brothers and, on the remarkable Arp 2600-laced track Open, George Clinton's groove-based P-Funk. Meanwhile, side two features four utterly transcendent late-night ballads imbued with the chilly trade winds of age and mortality.

2 Smokey Robinson And The Miracles
Going To A Go-Go

TAMLA, 1965

You say: "An 'all killer, no filler' LP." @PresidentSsc, via Twitter

The first LP to feature Smokey's name in the band title is a definite statement of intent. Overseen and produced by Robinson, it's a collection of four Top 20 singles and eight other equally impressive tracks, all but one written by the group. Moods vary from doo wop throwback Ooo Baby, Baby to driving dancers (Going To A Go-Go), string-drenched weepies (My Girl Has Gone), plus harmonic waltz Choosey Beggar and definitive soul ballad, The Tracks Of My Tears. The CD also includes 1967's *Away We A Go-Go* LP which features two truly great Dusty Springfield-influenced covers of You Don't Have To Say You Love Me and I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself.



Smokey Robinson
A Quiet Storm

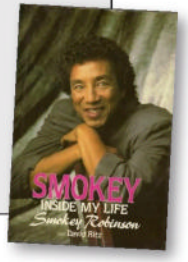
TAMLA, 1975

You say: "*A Quiet Storm* is amazing, particularly the astonishing title track." @RubyanDavid, via Twitter

Beginning with the synthesized sounds of a strong gale and what might be a distant shop alarm, the defining title track leads into a Jerry Jemmott-style funky bass, lush electric piano and Smokey Robinson singing in sultry tones about a love like "a power source of tender force". That tender force establishes the mood for the whole album, one where emotional pain is expressed as rapture. Beyond light flute groover Baby That's Backatcha and up-tempo closer Coincidentally, this is a work of sonic and lyrical unity, a mellow drift of balmy euphoria defined by essential details such as Marv Tarplin's easy-wristed Les Paul guitar licks, Fred Smith's dancing piccolo or Russ Turner's rumbling clavinet. *A Quiet Storm* eventually gave rise to an entire soul radio format, a fact that has weighed against it down the years, marking it out as a work of cliché and formula. The truth is anything but.

NOW DIG THIS

And so, to compilations. The best ones are Motown's *Anthology* (1974) by Smokey Robinson & The Miracles, and the 2-CD *The Solo Anthology* from 2001. It's also worth checking out the 1975 post-Smokey Miracles LA concept album, *City Of Angels*, if only for the glorious queer-positive Latin disco number Ain't Nobody Straight In LA. In regard to biographies, a new one is majorly overdue but 1989's autobiography, Inside My Life, as told to David Ritz, will do for the time being. In terms of documentaries, the best insight into Smokey's time at Motown is in 2019's Hitsville documentary but it's also worth watching the recent interviews Robinson gave to US journalist Vladimir Lyubovny and celebrity podcaster Marc Maron.



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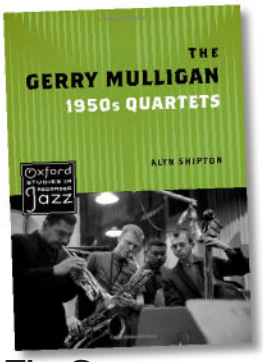


The Gerry Mulligan 1950s Quartets

★★★★

Alyn Shipton

OUP. £12.99

Meticulously detailed but intensely readable analysis of the baritone sax giant's creative heyday.

Non-musicians should not be intimidated by a glimpse of the trombone charts for Bweebida Bobbida. From Henry Grimes' poetic depiction of Gerry Mulligan's audition process – "Like you are laying on a rug that was woven by the man before you" – to Dizzy Gillespie mocking Art Farmer's too-snugly fitting linen slacks at the 1958 Great South Bay Festival ("You cats got some buns back there!"), BBC Radio 3's Jazz Record Requests host Alyn Shipton adds a generous spoonful of anecdotal sugar to help the musicological medicine go down. I've rarely seen the nuts and bolts of the arranger's art so clearly laid out, and Shipton's portrait of Mulligan – the cool jazz cat with a very hot temper, whose original Pacific Jazz *Gerry Mulligan Quartet* album cover could be a 2 Tone picture sleeve – is all the more compelling for its several contradictions.

Ben Thompson

The Story Of The B-52's: Neon Side Of Town

★★★

Scott Creney & Brigette Herron

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN. £27.99

Some Good Stuff here, but not quite a Whammy!

In 1978, John Peel played the original small-label cut of Rock Lobster by the then-unknown B-52's on his BBC show, then read out their Athens, Georgia mail order address so British listeners could buy it direct. A year later they were signed to a major and recording their debut LP with Chris Blackwell in the Bahamas. Even John Lennon was a fan. Authors Creney and Herron rightly acknowledge their debt to Mats Sexton's pioneering 2002 book The B-52's Universe, which now sells for hundreds of pounds. By contrast, their focus is to specifically consider the band's history from a gender studies and feminist perspective, but also as fans themselves, sometimes very defensively on the group's behalf – indeed, the authors once played in a support band at a B-52's reunion gig. Many vintage sources have been consulted, and key successes, setbacks, line-up changes and comebacks are detailed, but no band members agreed to be interviewed.

Max Décharné

B-Side: A Flipsided History Of Pop

★★★★

Andy Cowan

HEADPRESS. £10.99

What's on the other side? Those killer B's you just don't get with streaming.

Its 400-page heft dismantles suggestions this is the result of a simple pub debate – what are the crucial B-sides? – or just a playlist in need of an explanation, but what really distinguishes it is the legwork. Only here could the Bonzos' The Canyons Of Your Mind sit next to a 1922 song by the creator of the Charleston (that's an insight into the workings of the mind of all MOJO contributors, not just Cowan's), and kudos to anybody who has listened to every Elvis or John Lee Hooker B only to conclude that the best is so obvious it's their defining recording. Essays cover dub, instrumentals, the uninspired etc, and fingers are pointed at acts who rarely played the game. No shortage of inclusions to remind you that record companies never know what they are doing, and plenty with which you will disagree – The Byrds' Why doesn't make the cut!

David Hutcheon

Loaded: The Life (And Afterlife) Of The Velvet Underground

★★★

Dylan Jones

WHITE RABBIT. £25

Jog on the wild side: breezy cut-and-paste account of the most important band of the 1970s and 1980s.

"I couldn't have been a luckier guy," said Lou Reed, finding some unalloyed joy late in life. "I can't think of anything I'd have enjoyed more than meeting John [Cale], running into Sterl [Morrison] on the subway, hooking up with Maureen [Tucker] and being with Andy Warhol." Prolific biographer Jones's oral history is a cheery enough take on "a unit preternaturally devoted to transgression", weaving quotes from the key dramatis personae with more recent interjections from journo pals, hangers-on and Bobby Gillespie. The most poignant image, though, is a crushed, speed-addled Reed calling his parents in Long Island after his final Velvets show in 1970 to ask them to come and take him home. Loaded captures The Velvet Underground's huge impact on glam, punk and beyond, but also the way that legacy mauled and distorted Reed, Cale and Nico. The art is eternal, but might they have been happier had their lives not been saved by rock'n'roll?

Jim Wirth

Queer Blues: The Hidden Figures Of Early Blues Music

★★★★

Darryl W. Bullock

OMNIBUS. £20

Excellent companion piece to The Velvet Mafia and Pride, Pop And Politics.

In The Velvet Mafia: The Gay Men Who Ran The Swinging Sixties, Bullock celebrated the queer men who ignited that decade's pop revolution. In Queer Blues, he's keen to emphasise how LGBTQ+ emancipation didn't begin there, but can be traced back to the 1920s and '30s, when a community of tough black women – Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter, Ethel Waters etc – put blues on the musical map. Their stories are complex, fascinating and interwoven, oppressed as women, doubly so as black women. Working in an industry with white male gatekeepers, and yet independent and travelling the length and breadth of the country, they enjoyed same sex relationships and wrote about it: prime example Ma Rainey's Prove It On Me Blues, a resistance anthem expressing sexual liberation and gender non-conformity. Meticulously researched and rich in detail, Queer Blues is fabulous in its debunking of myths and righting of wrongs.

Lois Wilson

Come My Fanatics

★★★★

Dan Franklin

WHITE RABBIT. £30

Deep, dark, entertaining saga of doom-metallers Electric Wizard.

Legends abound regarding these beyond-Sabbath ear annihilators: degenerate leader Jus Oborn's father was a classmate of Robert Fripp and later a slaughterhouse worker; growing up in witchy Wimborne, Oborn glimpsed floggings in Masonic lodge windows, and as a pre-teen entered Dorset's lively drugs trade – EW's demented Y2K classic *Dopethrone* was named after a consignment of hashish artfully stacked in his front room. The band's influences, from Napalm Death, HP Lovecraft, B-movies and myriad submerged sources, are here minutely detailed but their career-oblivious progress towards global cultdom makes colourful reading: Oborn cheerily likened their first US performances to "having rats thrown in your face", but as that line-up imploded he found love Stateside with Liz Buckingham, his dream fellow guitarist and co-conspirator. Such is the singularity of the couple's worldview, you emerge convinced that Wizard are truly Sabbath's most illustrious heirs, their fierce mystique only intensified by this exhaustive chronicle.

Andrew Perry

Time Has Come: Revelations Of A Mississippi Hippie

★★★★

Lester Chambers with Thurman Watts

CHAMBERS PRESS. £16

Roller-coaster ride through '60s singer's life.

Lester Chambers was lead singer in The Chambers Brothers and this fast-paced account of his ascent, fall and recovery never lets up. Escaping dirt-poor beginnings in the deep South under the governance of the Grand Dragon of the KKK, he and his family fled at night to Los Angeles where he mowed lawns for bluesman Jimmy Reed and sang for TV's Superman, then via his group's gospel-singing residency at the Ash Grove – Mahalia Jackson called it "blasphemy" – he met Dylan at Newport and signed to Columbia where he voiced the 11-minute psych-soul masterpiece Time Has Come Today. Clive Davis hated it, producer David Rubinson was let go for it, but it hit the US chart. Yet there was no money and he ended up rough sleeping before a charity rescued him and got him singing again. A vivid, utterly fascinating portrait of a singular life with universal lessons.

Lois Wilson

Bomb squad: The B-52's at home on another planet.

Getty

Blow your own trumpet: David Bowie, who performed at MJF in 2002, has a toot on Miles Davis's horn.

Swiss watch

They All Came Out To Montreux

★★★★

Dir: Oliver Murray

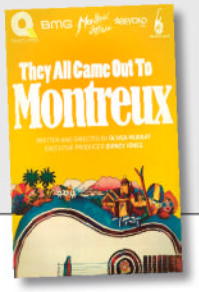
BMG. ST

TV mini-series tells the history of Montreux Jazz Festival, via a wealth of on-stage and back-stage footage. By Lois Wilson.

TOWARDS THE end of the first hour-long episode of this excellent three-part documentary about the Montreux Jazz Festival and its avuncular founder Claude Nobs, the camera focuses on a group of youths frolicking by a hotel swimming pool. It looks like something made by the Swiss tourist board, but as the camera pans across we see legendary bluesman Champion Jack Dupree sat at the piano by the pool, then the aforesaid Nobs arrives, in swimming shorts, whips out his blues harp and the pair begin to jam wild R&B boogie while the crowd, clad in trunks and bikinis, go crazy. Turns out this is one of several impromptu performances taking place during the 1970 Montreux Jazz Festival, and it's such spontaneous displays of *joie de vivre* that leads series producer Quincy Jones to call Montreux, "the Rolls-Royce of musical festivals".

Jones's statement is confirmed by cracking on-stage performances from Aretha, Buddy Guy and Talking Heads to Alicia Keys, The Roots and Prince. But this series is also packed with intimate backstage glimpses: Nina Simone at the piano rehearsing; Roberta Flack checking on her hair; Tony Bennett painting watercolours; Nobs cooking for his guests; all emphasising the festival's easy-going, familial vibe. A seemingly never-ending roll call of big-name interviewees, meanwhile, pay tribute to Nobs. 'Passionate' and 'enthusiastic' are words often repeated. Even the notorious Peter Grant liked him. When Nobs came to London to book Led Zeppelin for the 1971 festival, he left with no contract, just a "make sure the guys are happy". Which they were, returning to play the following year, by which time the Montreux Casino, the festival's original location, had burned to the ground thanks to a flare let off during Frank Zappa's performance – a catastrophe immortalised in Smoke On The Water by Deep Purple, who were set to record *Machine Head* there.

Born on the water in 1936, by 17 Nobs was working as a chef at the Territet Grand Hotel where he heard Ray Charles and John Coltrane on the radio and fell in love with Atlantic Records. Then after getting a job at the tourist office, he convinced his boss to give him 10,000 Swiss Francs to put on a jazz festival. He flew to Atlantic's New York office, doorstepped the label's then president Nesuhi Ertegun and the pair struck up an immediate friendship, Ertegun seeing Montreux as the first European port of call for his artists. The 1967 inaugural event was purely jazz, but by '69 the capacity had doubled, and the line-up expanded to include rock, pop and roots. It wasn't all plain sailing; Nobs was persecuted for being gay, but with his "Music first, everything is possible" mantra he won out, and this enthralling portrait leaves no doubt as to why they all came and still do.



Love In Bright Landscapes: The Story Of David McComb Of The Triffids

★★★★

Dir: Jonathan Alley

ATTICUS MEDIA. DVD/ST

Compelling chronicle of the leader of Australia's most dramatic group.

A labour of love by filmmaker Jonathan Alley, this portrait of David McComb doesn't flinch from the tragic nature of its subject. In the opening minutes, we learn of his various physical ailments (heart condition, malformed lung, scoliosis), his emotional complexity and his alcoholism. But Alley also chronicles The Triffids' uniqueness, their wilfulness, their ambition. "What they were playing was exactly not what you're meant to be playing in Australia," notes Nick Mainsbridge, engineer of their 1983 debut *Treeless Plain*, and the movie brings to life The Triffids' sense of all-engulfing romance, and how close to the sun they flew before gravity kicked in. Like Chekhov's gun, those aforementioned maladies ultimately call time on McComb, but Love In Bright Landscapes ably celebrates the imagery and atmospherics of his great works before the credits roll.

Stevie Chick

I Am Weekender

★★★★

Dir: WIZ, Chloé Raunet

BFI. BR/DVD

Baggy contenders Flowered Up's 15-minute rave movie, restored and curated.

Dangerous, hugely promising and always a little bit partial (to chaos and drugs), Flowered Up were hailed as London's Happy Mondays in 1990, but after some piquant singles they soon split. 1992's epic last gasp Weekender was their *Dark Side Of The Moon*, though, and here its Quadrophenia-on-E promo movie gets the restoration treatment. While some parts feel like watching an old British Pathé film, its weird power is undimmed, as it illuminates the transformative release of gushing endorphins on the dancefloor while being queasily aware of the inescapable comedown. New doc I Am Weekender features survivors and confidantes – hello again, dancer Barry Mooncult – picking out the bones, and while the hi-jinks are viewed through the prism of peak-rave, it's an ultimately sobering experience, made even more poignant by lead actor Lee Whitlock's death in February.

Ian Harrison

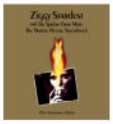
David Bowie

★★★★

Ziggy Stardust & The Spiders From Mars: The Motion Picture

RHINO. BR/CD/LP

50th anniversary of D.A. Pennebaker's Ziggy farewell undergoes digital refurb.



While legendary, Pennebaker's film of the last ever Ziggy concert in July 1973 has long been dogged by poor picture quality. Part of this was due to the inadequate stage lighting which left much of the audience in darkness: a major flaw for a performer whose identification with his fans was at its height. This upgrade restores the two Jeff Beck heroic rock jams. More importantly, it improves the visuals: while the concert-goers remain vague shapes, the detail of Bowie and the musicians comes over loud and clear, allowing the viewer to enjoy a show that is expertly poised between hard rock virtuosity, theatrical device, and pure teen mania. Bowie is at his imperial best: changing costume every few numbers, pulling shapes that range from mimetic to messianic. The crowd are with him all the way. The announcement is made: there is an audience gasp. The second encore is Rock'n'Roll Suicide: it ends with a quick "thank you very much, bye bye, we love you", and then he's off.

Jon Savage

Born In Chicago

★★★★

Dir: John Anderson, Bob Sarles

SHOUT! FACTORY/EAGLE ROCK. ST

Documentary on the life and afterlife of Chicago blues.

Twenty years after Martin Scorsese's seven-part TV series on the blues comes a documentary on the subject a mere 77 minutes long. A digital overhaul of Anderson's 2013 doc of the same name, its focus is on the birth of the blues in the industrial city where black Southern musicians moved to find work in the '40s, '50s and '60s, but also on the adoring young white musicians who learned how to play from them then took their music to a wider audience. The film portrays a more innocent pre-cultural appropriation time; even Blues Brother Dan Aykroyd's narration has a retro-movie feel. The story takes in London and San Francisco, the Newport and Monterey festivals, but nothing beats the archive footage from Chicago: a glorious trove of old interviews and live clips that includes Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and their leading acolyte Mike Bloomfield.

Sylvie Simmons

MJF Archive

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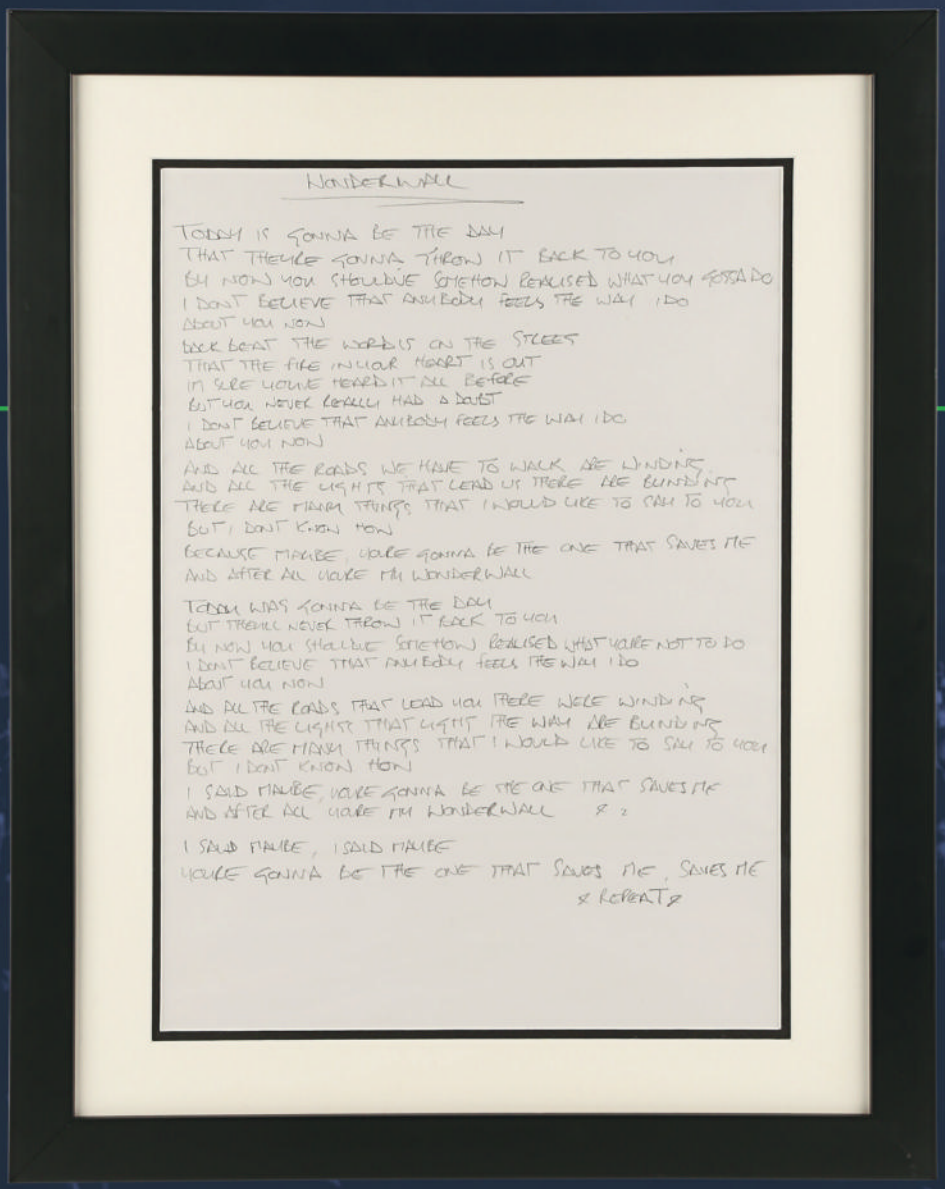

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November 2022

Thank Christ for the Groundhogs: Tony McPhee, loudly rejecting orthodoxy on-stage in Copenhagen, 1973.

Who Will Save The World?

Tony McPhee, one-of-a-kind guitarist, lyricist and leader of the Groundhogs, left us on June 6.

LEGEND SAYS that in their prime the Groundhogs, led by Tony McPhee, received consolatory letters from the Guinness Book Of Records. These informed them they were the second-hardest touring band after Jethro Tull, and the second-loudest band after Deep Purple. If the Groundhogs' standing today is more modest than their more famous peers, however, McPhee's legacy is every bit their equal.

Born in Lincolnshire on March 23, 1944, and raised in Streatham, the teenage McPhee was thrilled by Cyril Davies & The All-Stars, and played rock'n'roll and blues by night after working for the Post Office. A connoisseur blueser, in 1963 he founded the Groundhogs alongside bassist Pete Cruickshank. They were named for Ground Hog Blues by John Lee Hooker, who the band would back on his 1964 UK tour; they did the same for such visiting blues greats as Jimmy Reed, Champion Jack Dupree and Little Walter. With the British blues boom waning, McPhee disbanded the group in 1966 for other projects, including the poppier Herbal Mixture, and then the John Dummer Blues Band.

> "Hendrix… projected electric frustration."
> TONY McPHEE

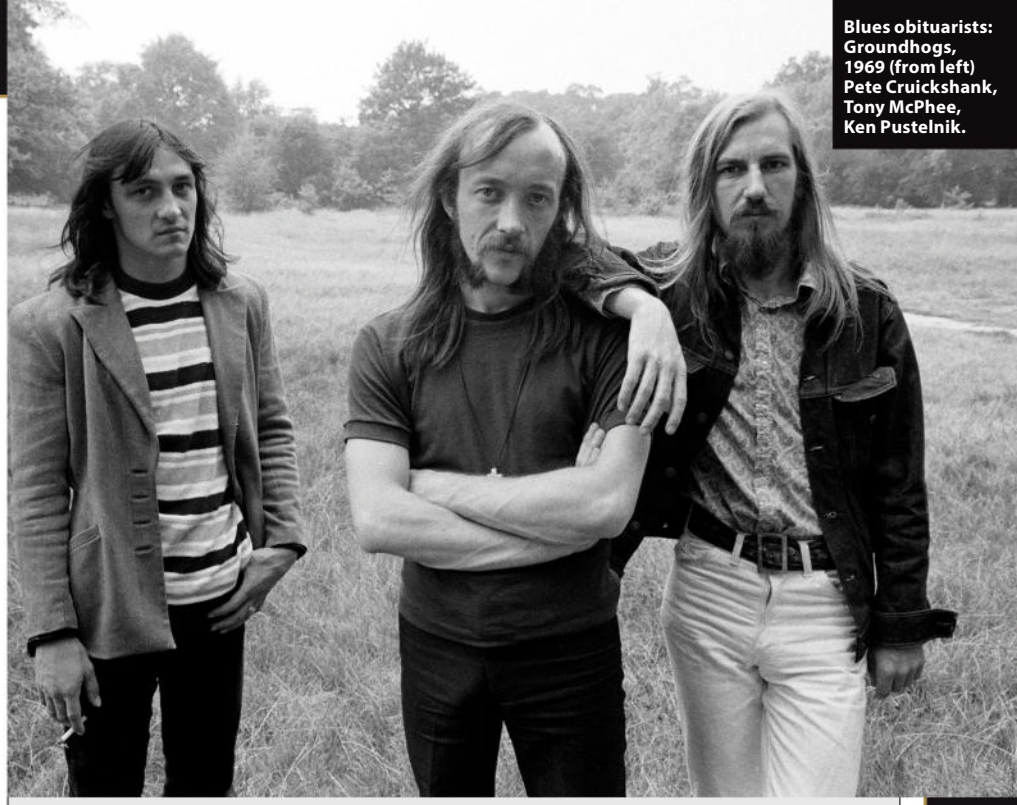
Yet, with freer blues developments in the air, McPhee reconvened the Groundhogs in 1968 and signed to the new, happening Liberty label. If 1969's *Blues Obituary* was an explicit rejection of orthodoxy, the new decade's *Thank Christ For The Bomb* struck out into new territory, examining class, the futility of war and the existential threat of the nuclear age, with supercharged riffs. With John Peel's support, a new, ear-splitting PA system for live dates and a tour opening for The Rolling Stones, it reached UK Number 9 in summer 1970. Remarkable, schizoid follow-up *Split* peaked at Number 5 in March 1971, shortly after which McPhee reflected on his admiration for Hendrix to Record Mirror: "Hendrix was one of the greatest blues guitarists ever because he projected just that kind of electric frustration – after listening to him you felt you wanted to go out and break something." Throughout this successful period, the hard-gigging group remained

THE LEGACY

The Album: Groundhogs *Split* (LIBERTY, 1971)

The Sound: Piercing, prog-punk blues rock, with a 20-minute, four-part examination of schizophrenia on Side One sparked by a drug experience gone wrong. Elsewhere, Junkman lumbers like a yeti, Groundhog rearranges the John Lee song that gave them their name, and Cherry Red boasts one of their most ecstatic riffs ever, all replete with arcane sound manipulations that mirror the bizarro cut-up image of McPhee on the sleeve.

Getty (2) Alamy



Blues obituarists: Groundhogs, 1969 (from left) Pete Cruickshank, Tony McPhee, Ken Pustelnik.

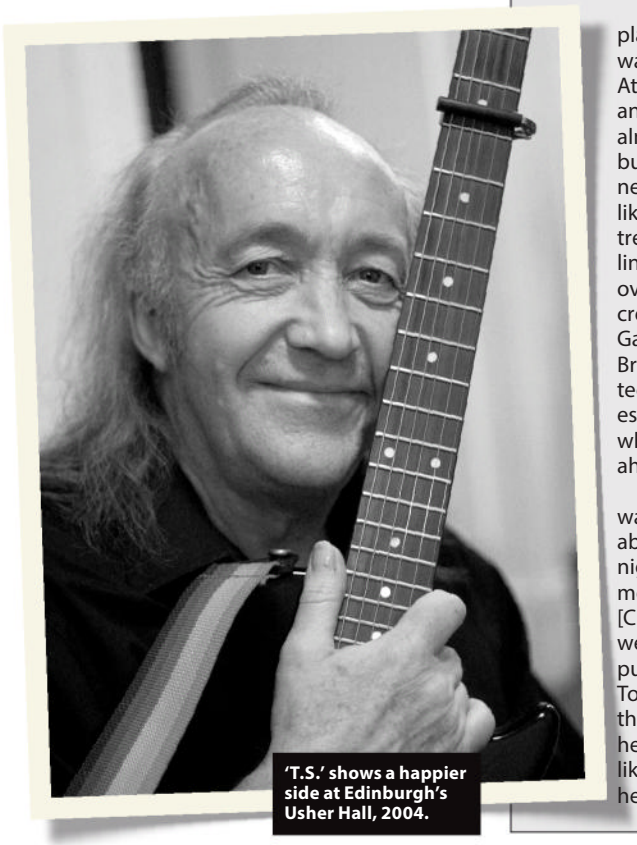
modest in their tastes. As well as eschewing catering for the local fish and chop shop, the man the music weeklies called 'Mac' relaxed on tour by re-soldering his guitar pedals.

1972's eco-concept *Who Will Save The World? The Mighty Groundhogs* hit Number 8 a year later. Further proof that the trad blues were way back in the rearview mirror, it displayed McPhee's growing interest in synthesizers. It was also their commercial peak. Their new management team was headed by one Wilf Pine, whose 2003 biography was entitled One Of The Family: The Englishman And The Mafia. He got them to America, but after McPhee broke his wrist in a horse-riding accident in Pennsylvania in summer 1972, momentum was lost, with drummer Ken Pustelnik leaving the classic line-up.

Remarkable music still followed, including 1972's hard, progressive *Hogwash* and '73's blues/synth cri de coeur *The Two Sides Of T.S.(Tony) McPhee* (credited to McPhee solo, the 'T.S.' stood for 'Tough Shit'). After another split and reconfiguration, however, the band were laid to rest in 1976. McPhee continued to lead new Groundhogs formations and record solo, with the occasional hiatus, while the classic line-up reunited to tour in 2003. In 2009 he suffered the first of several strokes but kept on playing, most recently, in 2015, with Current 93.

McPhee thought it was "weird" that he had fans from the punk-and-after milieu. These included Karl Hyde, Captain Sensible, Stephen Malkmus, Queens Of The Stone Age and Mark E. Smith, who miscredited McPhee as 'Tony McFree' when covering Junkman in 1994. McPhee's wife Joanna thanked his admirers for their words of tribute, saying, "he would have been made mighty indeed by the love and recognition."

Ian Harrison



'T.S.' shows a happier side at Edinburgh's Usher Hall, 2004.

"He was the Eccentric Man."

Classic-era Groundhogs drummer **Ken Pustelnik** remembers Tony McPhee.

I'D ALREADY booked The John Dummer Blues Band, so I already knew Tony before I had anything to do with him professionally. My impression of him initially was, a bloke in a band. I didn't get him until I started working with him. We did kind of like an audition in London, and it just was magic. When we got to the first recording, which was literally before we'd even done a gig as a unit, he said, "Let's play it live", because he could see that there was something different here.

People talk about his guitar playing but I think the thing that was best about Tony was his lyrics. At the time, nobody was doing anything like them – simplified, almost like a nursery rhyme thing, but something more, which I'd never heard anywhere else. Lyrics like. "Soldier, stand firm in your trenches, don't let them break the line," [Soldier] or, "My garden is all overgrown and the weeds are creeping up on my home," from Garden, a slow sort of dreamy British landscape in technicolour… that to me was the essence of it. He did it his own way, which I think is part of why he was ahead of his time.

Tony was different, but he was unpredictable. He could be absolutely world beating one night and the next me and Pete [Cruickshank, bass] were kind of pushing it because Tony's looking for the ideas. But when he gets the idea, it's like, oh my God, here we go. And you never know any time. So just that sort of tension was quite exciting. He wouldn't broach anybody else producing stuff for the Groundhogs. Once, when he hadn't written anything, I wrote a song called Blue Boy, and four days later he'd written *Thank Christ For The Bomb*! I'm quite good at leading people to do things.

He seemed to be, you know, introvert. He just seemed to keep it to himself, sort of look his feet. Not saying anything, that's actually, to him, the stamp of approval. If you weren't doing [what he wanted], he would just go, "Er, hmm, uh," at you. If something irked him, we'd get it in the dressing room when there weren't too many people around.

He was the Eccentric Man. To be honest, I still to this day wonder whether that song [from *Thank Christ For The Bomb*] was autobiographical. He was absolutely brilliant at being friendly in public, but he was not a people's person. When we did the 40th anniversary [reunion], we were at the Trades Club [Hebden Bridge, 2003] and in the dressing room there was this lady saying, "I've got a music shop down the road, blah blah, wouldn't you like to retire and have a music shop?" And he just looked at her and said, (*growls*) "I don't like working with the public."

He really was quite tough. The strokes came as one hell of a surprise to us. And then when he had more mini strokes, then more big strokes… but he kept going, and I thought, That's typical of him, still doing it, despite the odds. You've got to admire that. Very sad happenings, is all I can say. We just drifted away from each other, I suppose. We did get back together for things like contract signings, the business bit, and we'd go around the corner, have a beer, and it was, "see you again, mate – somewhere."

As told to Ian Harrison

"He did it his own way… he was ahead of his time."
KEN PUSTELNIK

The girl done good: Astrud Gilberto, the queen of Brazilian bossa nova, in 1965.

The Girl From Ipanema

Brazilian music legend **Astrud Gilberto** left us on June 5.

"TALL AND TAN and young and lovely…" – the first words Astrud Gilberto ever sang in a studio are among the most evocative in the history of popular music. Yet The Girl From Ipanema, her signature song, recorded at a Stan Getz and João Gilberto session in March 1963 and the hit single that would cast a shadow over the rest of her career, would also become a source of heartbreak. While a host of sharp operators benefited financially, the singer was dismissed by Getz as just "a housewife" he had discovered and used because she was the only person in the room who could sing in English. The slight rankled, and with good reason – Gilberto was always so much more than Getz ever gave her credit for.

Though Astrud Weinert grew up in Rio de Janeiro, she was born on March 29, 1940 in Salvador in the northeast of Brazil, and was fluent in English, Portuguese and four more languages (her German father was a languages professor). As a teenager, she was obsessed with music, which brought her into the circle that had formed around João Gilberto, then making a name for himself as one of the inventors of bossa nova. They married in 1959, with Astrud occasionally making guest appearances at his shows but otherwise content to sing at home.

All that changed when her husband suggested to saxophonist Getz that the couple sing a duet on Garota De Ipanema, a recent Brazilian hit written by Antônio Carlos Jobim and Vinícius de Moraes. Shorn of the full-length version's Portuguese verses (sung by João), the single's blend of innocence and melancholy made the Billboard Top 5 and won Record Of The Year at the 1964 Grammys. At the same ceremony, the LP became the first jazz long-player to take home the album award.

Shunned in Brazil, where critics accused her of becoming the face of bossa nova on the coattails of João, she was nevertheless signed to Verve in North America, for whom she recorded eight albums of complex, sophisticated easy-listening, including peerless versions of Fly Me To The Moon, Call Me, So Nice (Summer Samba), Light My Fire and How Insensitive. At a time when jazz sales figures were in decline, her work with Stanley Turrentine and Gil Evans did much to keep the genre in the public eye.

She would later work with both James Last and George Michael, and released her final album, *Jungle*, in 2002; the closing track on that is her take on Bacharach and David's The Look Of Love, a song that surely owed its very existence to the singer's finest three minutes. Shortly after, she retired from music to concentrate on painting and campaigning for animal rights.

David Hutcheon

> "Her signature song… would also become a source of heartbreak."

THE LEGACY

The album: *I Haven't Got Anything Better To Do* (Verve, 1969)

The sound: Recorded over two days in February 1969, this is Gilberto's response to 1967's *Francis Albert Sinatra & Antônio Carlos Jobim*, replacing the 51-year-old Chairman of the Board's diminishing swagger with a youthful surrender to unavoidable absence. Brazilian composers are replaced by Jimmy Webb, Harry Nilsson and Bacharach/David; the cover image tells you all you need to know.

Fremantle Media/Shutterstock

Urge Overkill's mayhemic, streetwise drummer Blackie Onassis, ace keeper of time.

Cynthia Weil

Songwriter Olympian

BORN 1940

IN OCTOBER 1961, Tony Orlando's teen drama Bless You's entry into the Billboard Top 20 marked the chart debut of a new songwriting team, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil. Mann was a Brooklyn-born, self-taught, ambitious musician and singer – he had a hit with Who Put The Bomp (In The Bomp, Bomp, Bomp) that year – and Weil a privately educated Broadway-steeped wordsmith from Manhattan's Upper West Side. Two weeks later, this chalk-and-cheese couple were married. It was the start of a golden partnership which ended on June 1 when Cynthia passed away, aged 82.

Raised in a wealthy Jewish household, Weil's father died when she was seven and she felt closer to her German nanny than her mother, whose expectations she confounded when she opted to follow in the dancing footsteps of a black-sheep aunt who'd become a chorus girl. Weil graduated in theatre from Sarah Lawrence and, pursuing her interest in songwriting, was mentored for a short time by the great musical theatre auteur Frank Loesser (Guys & Dolls) who despised rock'n'roll, calling its consumers "pimplefarms". Weil herself thought Elvis "silly" but started to recognise the value of pop after being sent to write with new partnership Gerry Goffin and Carole King. Lyricist Goffin, Weil said, showed her how to craft effective songs by writing "simply but with great humanity", eschewing the showier smarts of the Broadway writers. Once she started working with Mann, Weil combined both skillsets in storytelling, New York-themed songs like Uptown and On Broadway, starting their connection with Phil Spector, which led, in 1964, to their crowning triumph, The Righteous Brothers' You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin', declared by BMI to be the most performed song of the 20th century.

Surviving pop's many shifts in taste – and a brief separation in the '80s – the couple continued to write hits for over 30 years, among them We Gotta Get Out Of This Place (Animals), I Just Can't Help Believing (Elvis), Here You Come Again (Dolly), their last smash being Hanson's I Will Come To You in 1997. When the hits finally faded, Weil wrote other things, publishing her first novel, a thriller, in 2015. She is survived by her husband and their daughter, Jenn Mann.

Jim Irvin

Power couple: supreme hit-making machine Cynthia Weil and surviving husband Barry Mann in 1969.

Véronique Skelsey, Andy Catlin, Getty (2), Andy Caitlin

Blackie Onassis

Urge Overkill drummer, cool cat

BORN 1965

URGE OVERKILL formed in 1985, but only with the recruitment of southwest Chicago native John Rowan did their vaingloriously flamboyant alt-rock vehicle click into gear. As Blackie Onassis, alongside founder members Nash Kato and Eddie 'King' Roeser, he brought his mayhemic drumming and streetwise charisma to 1991 album *The Supersonic Storybook*, earning admiration from Nirvana and a major deal with Geffen. Their version of Neil Diamond's Girl, You'll Be A Woman Soon became a hit in 1994, following its use in Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction. Subsequently, the band crashed amid personality clashes and heroin addiction, poignantly related on the Blackie-written and sung The Mistake from 1995's *Exit The Dragon*. Not included in Urge's 21st century reunion, Blackie was clean and happy when MOJO met him in Los Angeles in 2016: "We weren't the greatest musicians," he said, "but together we had a certain thing." Urge Overkill's social media announced Blackie's passing on June 14, saying: "He will be missed." No cause of death was given.

Keith Cameron

Sylvan Morris

Studio One's sonic architect

BORN C.1949

AS '60s JAMAICAN producers essentially operated as A&R men and financers, it was engineers like Sylvan Morris who really defined the emerging sound of reggae. Born in Trenchtown, the precocious teenager fixed radios before working under Graeme Goodall at Byron Lee's West Indies Radio Ltd. At 19, at the height of rocksteady, he moved to Duke Reid's Treasure Isle, overseeing The Jamaicans' Ba Ba Boom, but soon quit over Reid's gun-toting methods, joining his rival Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd's Studio One. There, alongside musical director Jackie Mittoo, he cut foundation reggae classics with Burning Spear, Dennis Brown, Marcia Griffiths and numerous others, using rudimentary equipment to sculpt booming bass and crunchy productions. After falling out with Dodd, by '74 Morris was at Chris Blackwell-funded Harry J's, where his credits included three immortal Bob Marley & The Wailers LPs, including 1974's *Natty Dread*. Failing eyesight ended his supremacy in the '80s, but his sonic vision remained fundamental in Jamaican music right through the dancehall era.

Andrew Perry

"Engineers like Morris really defined the emerging sound of reggae."

Teresa Taylor

Buttholes Surfer's twin-drum titan

BORN 1962

BORN IN Arlington, Texas, Teresa Taylor played in school marching bands before joining Texan rock absurdists the Butthole Surfers, helping power the mindbending live assaults that defined the group alongside King Coffey, their tandem stand-up drums punctuating a chaotic sensory overload. Featuring slightly intermittently from 1983 to 1989, Taylor played on key albums including *Rembrandt Pussyhorse* and *Locust Abortion Technician*, but left the band after suffering seizures which she linked to strobe lighting at live shows. She later moved further into the public consciousness after she took a part in Richard Linklater's 1990 Generation X satire Slacker, becoming the film's poster star. Prior to her death from lung disease, Taylor had worked at the Texas School For The Blind And Visually Impaired in Austin; she had also been writing a memoir on her time in the Buttholes, who she returned to briefly in 2008.

Roy Wilkinson

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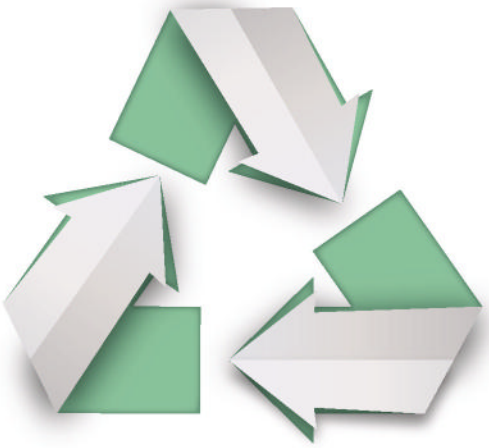

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Heavy metal: the unsparingly intense Peter Brötzmann.

John Waddington

The Pop Group's s ecret weapon

BORN 1960

IN INTERVIEW, Pop Group guitarist Waddington was taciturn, the quiet man to wild boys Mark Stewart and Gareth Sager. But as the band's statement noted, he was "an influential musician… an integral member [who] contributed to some of the band's most iconic recordings". In fact, John was there for the entirety of The Pop Group's initial career, quitting his own band of hopefuls The Boyfriends in 1977 and staying put until the messy dissolution in 1981. His contribution – interlacing upbeat funk rhythms with spiralling Magic Band lead lines – fitted the band's stylistic free-for-all perfectly. Waddington later joined Maximum Joy and played on various On-U Sound projects before stints with electro act U-BahnX and the Britpop era's Perfume (that's his artwork on the *One* cover). John's last known work was playing bass on Lily Allen's *Alright, Still* (2006). Asked about Waddington in 2014, Mark Stewart characterised his ex-colleague as a bearded, ukulele-playing "Brian Wilson figure".

Mark Paytress

Peter Brötzmann

Teutonic sax giant

BORN 1941

BORN INTO wartime in Remscheid, Brötzmann studied visual art and flirted with the Fluxus movement before teaching himself saxophone. First inspired by visiting US jazzers Sidney Bechet and Eric Dolphy, he arrived at his trademark screaming sax sound independently, setting up his own label Brö for 1967's unsparingly intense debut *For Adolphe Sax*. For the following year's *Machine Gun* (titled after Don Cherry's nickname for his violent style), Brötzmann recruited a hive-minded octet including saxophonist Evan Parker and drummer Han Bennink, their vivid, battering ram interactions resonating with anti-Vietnam protesters. He recorded partially underwater on 1977's *Schwarzwaldfahrt*, a forward-thinking mix of Black Forest field recordings and jazz, before going global via Bill Laswell's punky supergroup Last Exit and his Albert Ayler-inspired Die Like A Dog Quartet. Ceaselessly prolific, he described music as "a lifelong journey to figure out".

Andy Cowan

THEY ALSO SERVED

HARD ROCKING PHOTOGRAPHER **MICK HUTSON** (below, b.1965) worked on the North Sea oil fields before spending several decades as a top-level rock lensman, working for magazines including MOJO, Q and Metal Hammer, taking superb images of **Paul McCartney**, **Madonna**, **Lemmy**, **Ozzy Osbourne**, **AC/DC**, **Aerosmith** and **The Rolling Stones**, among others. Thriving on pressure and challenge, he frequently hung out of a helicopter to capture stunning aerial views of the Glastonbury festival, and persuaded numerous stars to be photographed on the toilet. He also struggled with bipolar disorder. A man of huge personal warmth, there was no finer companion on a work assignment, and his many friends will never forget him.

SINGER AND MANDOLIN PLAYER **JESSE McREYNOLDS** (b.1929) performed as part of Virginia bluegrass duo **Jim And Jesse** alongside his older brother Jim for 55 years, and contributed mandolin to **The Doors**' 1969 album *The Soft Parade*. One of the most commercially successful bluegrass acts of the '60s and '70s, the pair introduced electric and pedal steel guitars into their set-up: after Jim's death in 2002, Jesse continued to perform and in 2010 released an album of **Grateful Dead** covers, a band who cited Jim And Jesse as a key influence.

REGGAE guitarist and singer **LES McNEIL** (b.unknown) was a member of versatile Brent band **Tradition**, who signed to the RCA label and released early UK dub albums including 1980's cult selection *Captain Ganja And The Space Patrol*. After they split in 1983, he released numerous solo songs in the lovers rock vein, and rejoined Tradition in the new millennium.

GUITARIST **JACK LEE** (b.1952) wrote Hanging On The Telephone for his influential and short-lived power pop band **The Nerves**, who also included Paul Collins and Peter Case, in 1976. The song was later turned into an international hit by **Blondie** in 1978. He also wrote Come Back And Stay, a 1983 hit for **Paul Young** (Young recorded two more Lee songs for his 1983 smash *No Parlez*), and released two solo albums.

SINGER AND GUITARIST **DAN LARDNER** (b.1991) co-fronted New York indie rockers **QTY**. Signed to The 1975's Dirty Hit label, their Bernard Butler-produced self-titled debut was released in 2017. The band disbanded in 2018 and Lardner went on to perform solo shows with The Lemonheads' **Evan Dando**. Lardner was Dando's guest of honour when he opened for The Psychedelic Furs in May.

ORGANIST **REUBEN WILSON** (b.1935) pioneered soul-jazz, with 1969's Blue Note LP *Love Bug* featuring trumpet player Lee Morgan and guitarist Grant Green. In the '70s he cut sessions for **The Fat Back Band** and others before retiring. Rediscovered in the '80s by UK soul DJs including Gilles Peterson, his music influenced Acid Jazz, while in the '90s **A Tribe Called Quest** and **Nas** sampled his music. Wilson returned to activity and toured with Guru's Jazzmatazz Revue.

ASLAN vocalist **CHRISTY DIGNAM** (right, b.1960) fronted the Dublin band in the '80s and sang their 1986 Irish hit, This Is. The group's 1988 debut album *Feel No Shame* was poised for crossover success when Dignam left the group, reportedly over an addiction to heroin he'd developed as a way of coping with a childhood scarred by sexual abuse. He rejoined Aslan in 1993 and the group proceeded to record seven more studio albums. Dignam released his solo album *The Man Who Stayed Alive* in 2021.

PIANIST **GEORGE WINSTON** (left, b.1949) helped define the New Age genre with his 1980 album *Autumn* for the then-fledgling Windham Hill label, though he called his music "rural folk piano". In 1994 he won the Best New Age Album Grammy for *Forest*. Settling in San Francisco's Bay Area, Winston sold over 15 million records, with *Night Divides The Day: The Music Of The Doors* arriving in 2002. In 1983, he formed the Dancing Cat label to release Hawaiian slack-key guitar music.

MANDOLIN player and singer **BOBBY OSBORNE** (b.1931), with his brother Sonny, led Ohio-based band **The Osborne Brothers** from 1953. To some purists' dismay, they broadened the perception of what bluegrass could be, by using three-part harmonies, amplified instruments, drums, bass and more, and incorporating pop and rock material into their repertoire. In 1964 they were inducted into the Grand Ole Opry, while in 1982 their 1967 hit Rocky Top was made an official state song of Tennessee. Sonny died in 2021. Until his death, Bobby played in his band **Rocky Top X-Press**, alongside his son Bobby Jr.

SINGER AND INDUSTRY executive **STUART SLATER** (b.1945) fronted Merseybeat act **The Mojos**, and as a major label executive worked with **Spandau Ballet**, **Wet Wet Wet** and **Go West** among others. Born in Liverpool, as Stu James he co-wrote The Mojos' 1964 Top 10 hit Everything's Alright, later covered by **David Bowie** on 1973's *Pin Ups*. After drummer **Aynsley Dunbar** and bassist/future Professionals actor **Lewis Collins** joined, they split up in 1966. Slater also composed two UK Eurovision entries.

RAGGA-TINGED East End **MC ALKALINE** (b.Donovan Hart, 1970), alongside **Gunshot** bandmates **Mercury** and **White Child Rix**, helped define the early-'90s super-speedy Britcore hip-hop sound, which presaged grime and influenced The Prodigy. Five bludgeoning singles and a John Peel session landed before 1993's debut *Patriot Games* breached the UK charts and broke them in Germany. Inactive since 2000, Gunshot made a surprise return in 2018 with Sulphur.

SONGWRITER AND LYRICIST **SHELDON HARNICK** (b.1924) co-wrote numerous highly regarded Broadway musicals, the most famous being 1964's **Fiddler On The Roof**, whose songs including If I Were A Rich Man, Do You Love Me? and Sunrise, Sunset were interpreted by artists as diverse as **Cannonball Adderley**, **The Magnetic Fields**, **Vera Lynn** and **The JAMs**.

Jenny Bulley, Chris Catchpole, Andy Cowan and Ian Harrison

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Beastly behaviour: (clockwise from below) The Animals' (from left) Hilton Valentine, Eric Burdon and Chas Chandler on-stage, August 1964; "slippery" manager Mike Jeffery; 1964 Number 1 smash The House Of The Rising Sun; railing against the norm: (from left) Burdon, Valentine, Chandler, John Steel, Alan Price, April 30, 1964.

AUGUST 1964
The Animals fly close to the Rising Sun

AUGUST 29 They'd played their first gig on September 11, 1963, at the Downbeat club in Newcastle. Less than a year later, The Animals were at Number 1 in America with The House Of The Rising Sun. Theirs was an electric version of a much-covered traditional song whose origins are impossible to know with certainty, but whose vibrations of doom and inescapable nemesis, it seemed, escaped from the grooves to assail the group itself.

One of the toughest British R&B acts in thrall to black American music, the North-east five-piece had their first UK hit in April with Number 21 entry Baby Let Me Take You Home. On May 9, they'd duly gone on tour of the Odeons and Gaumonts of Britain for a month with headliner Chuck Berry.

"We'd been playing and working up an arrangement of The House Of The Rising Sun for some time," wrote Animals frontman Eric Burdon in his 1986 memoir I Used To Be An Animal, But I'm All Right Now, in which he also remembered road manager Peter Grant (later manager of Led Zeppelin) posting pound notes under Berry's door. "The reaction was tremendous."

Sung before the interval, with Burdon lit by a single red light, the song was a hurricane of emotion and dread driven by Hilton Valentine's arpeggio guitar, Alan Price's tortured Vox Continental organ and Burdon's vengeful blues wail. A recording date at De Lane Lea studios in Soho with producer Mickie Most was arranged in between gigs. In Sean Egan's 2001 biography Animal Tracks, drummer John Steel stated they'd selected the song from Bob Dylan's 1962 debut, and finished it at 3am on May 18: "The whole bloody process took about 10 minutes." Most initially thought it was a B-side, but acknowledged its genius, despite its then-unheard-of length of four-and-a-half minutes. The changing of the narrator from New Orleans prostitute to gambler made radio play more likely.

But already, a curse was descending. Manager Mike Jeffery, whose slipperiness became legend and who later handled Jimi Hendrix, said that while the credit would read 'Trad. Arr. A. Price' – 'Trad. Arr.' being a common ploy to cop the publishing for an existing song – all the band would be remunerated equally. It seems this did not happen. "With a stroke of a pen the rest of The Animals were screwed," wrote Burdon in his next memoir, 2001's Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood. "[It was] the biggest mistake of our lives."

> "With a stroke of a pen the rest of The Animals were screwed."
> **ERIC BURDON**

Possibly as Jeffery planned, the group had no time to consider their predicament. The House Of The Rising Sun reached UK Number 1 on July 9, as the hard-touring band played one-nighters across the UK. "When the time came to perform that song it seemed everybody's face in the whole place lit up. I walked off stage never feeling more high in my entire life," wrote Burdon in 1986. He then recalled smoking some "African grass" given to him by Graham Bond, who'd told him, "the whole world's going to know your name, but you'll never have any money."

As the American release, with Price's organ solo crudely chopped out to bring it under the radio-friendly three-minute mark, was heading up the US Top 40 in August, The Animals stayed on the road. Dates included the Kingston Cellar, with support from The Plebs (August 5), and Dunstable's California Ballroom with Johnny Kaye & The Kossacks (August 22). The August 14 edition of NME found Price saying, "apart from the money, the only difference it's made is being asked for more autographs…

Getty (7), Alamy (2)

if all this finished tomorrow I wouldn't really care." Burdon added that he wanted to make experimental horror films, having seen Luis Buñuel's eyeball-chopping Un Chien Andalou.

After The House Of The Rising Sun topped the US charts on August 29, the group arrived in America on September 3, becoming fully-fledged combatants in the British Invasion. While Burdon resented booking agent Don Arden's fiat that they wear smart suits, they did get to meet Bob Dylan (Steel says he played them Subterranean Homesick Blues). Huge American success followed, with Bruce Springsteen later declaring The Animals a "revelation". Folk music and electric rock had met and the reverberations would be colossal. Ted Anthony, in 2007's detective story/travelogue Chasing The Rising Sun, reflected on the song's journey from England to the Appalachians, the blues, Alan Lomax and Dylan, and called The Animals' recording, "the narrow part of the song's historical hourglass. All that had gone before flowed into this moment."

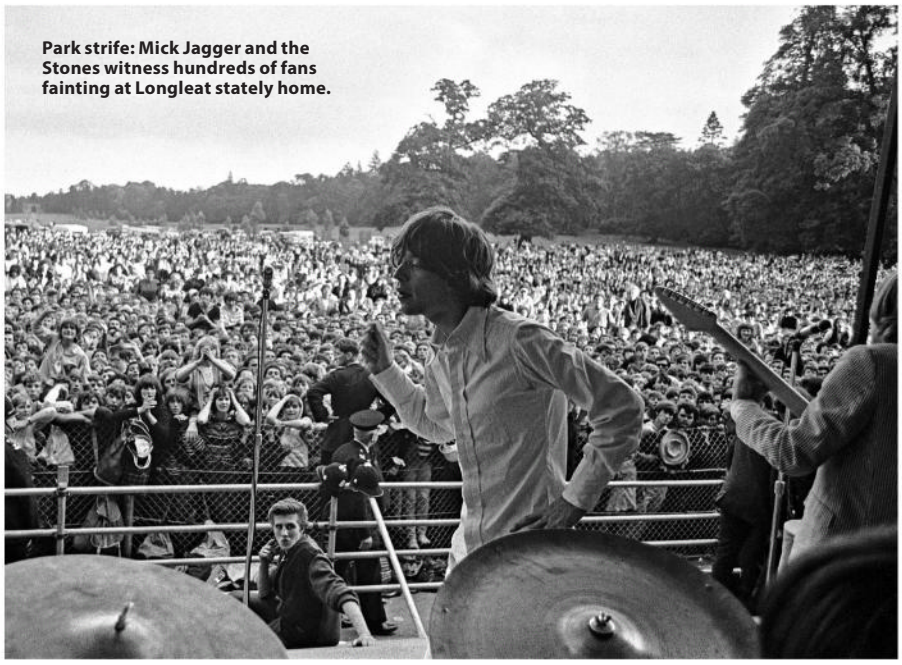
Soon the sands ran out for The Animals. The hits were still coming when Price left in April '65, but the original group were history by 1967. Attempts at re-formations have not been happy. The last date of a reunion at Newcastle City Hall on December 17, 1983, found Burdon changing the words of their most famous song to warn against joining a rock'n'roll band. When they were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in January 1994, Price sat at another table to his bandmates. Burdon refused to attend.

Ian Harrison

Draw conclusions: Neil Aspinall (far left) and Dylan before meeting the Fabs.

Dylan gets The Beatles high

AUGUST 28 **After playing a gig in the Forest Hills Stadium in Queens, the Fabs meet Bob Dylan at the Delmonico Hotel in Manhattan, in a conclave brokered by journalist Al Aronowitz. Dylan is surprised they're not experienced pot smokers, believing the words "I get high" appear in I Want To Hold Your Hand, and duly turns them on. "That was rather a coup," reflected Paul McCartney in 1997 biography Many Years From Now. In the days preceding, The Beatles also met Burt Lancaster and Jayne Mansfield, spoke to Elvis on the phone, and, at 7pm on August 24, were guests at a fundraiser for haemophilia research at the Bel Air home of Capitol Records President Alan Livingston, which raised $10,000.**



Park strife: Mick Jagger and the Stones witness hundreds of fans fainting at Longleat stately home.

STONES CAUSE RIOTS

AUGUST 2 200 fans are treated for injuries when The Rolling Stones play to 16,000 spectators at the 3rd Pop Festival at Longleat. On August 8 there's a riot at their debut Dutch gig at the Kurhaus in Scheveningen. The same day, manager Andrew Loog Oldham tells Melody Maker he's quitting, saying, "I think I've aged four years in the last year." Two weeks later, Marianne Faithfull, who's just hit the charts with As Tears Go By, tells the paper, "the day I was introduced to them, I didn't feel a thing – except sorrow for the Stones… I hate the star cult." The Five By Five EP is released on August 14; later in the month, Mick Jagger denies he's going solo.

ALSO ON!

HONEY, MONSTER

5 The Honeycombs' Have I The Right enters the UK Top 40 at 34. It reaches Number 1 in September. Their female drummer Honey Lantree (above) causes some consternation. "I suppose I *am* a gimmick because there aren't many girl drummers in beat groups," she says. "I just want to be judged on what I play."

GOODBYE JOHNNY

14 Memphis singer Johnny Burnette dies in a boating accident in Clear Lake, California. He enjoyed several pop hits in the early '60s, wrote for Ricky Nelson, and, with his Rock And Roll Trio, leaves some of the most furious rockabilly sides ever recorded.

CZAS NA POLSKI JAZZ

18 Polish jazzer Zbigniew Namyslowski and his Modern Jazz Quartet perform at Ronnie Scott's in London. While they're here, they record the LP *Lola* for Decca and play the Richmond Jazz Festival.

NUDGE, KINK

26 The Kinks' debut 45 You Really Got Me enters the Top 20 at Number 15. In three weeks it's at Number 1. Already Dave Davies is musing to Melody Maker, "I might go into a monastery for a few years."

SWEET CAROLINE

29 Today on Radio Caroline you can hear All Systems Go (4pm, with Tony Blackburn), Caroline Club Requests (6pm, with Keith Skues) and Downbeat (8pm, with Errol Bruce, who later investigates UFOs and the paranormal in Canada).

TOP TEN

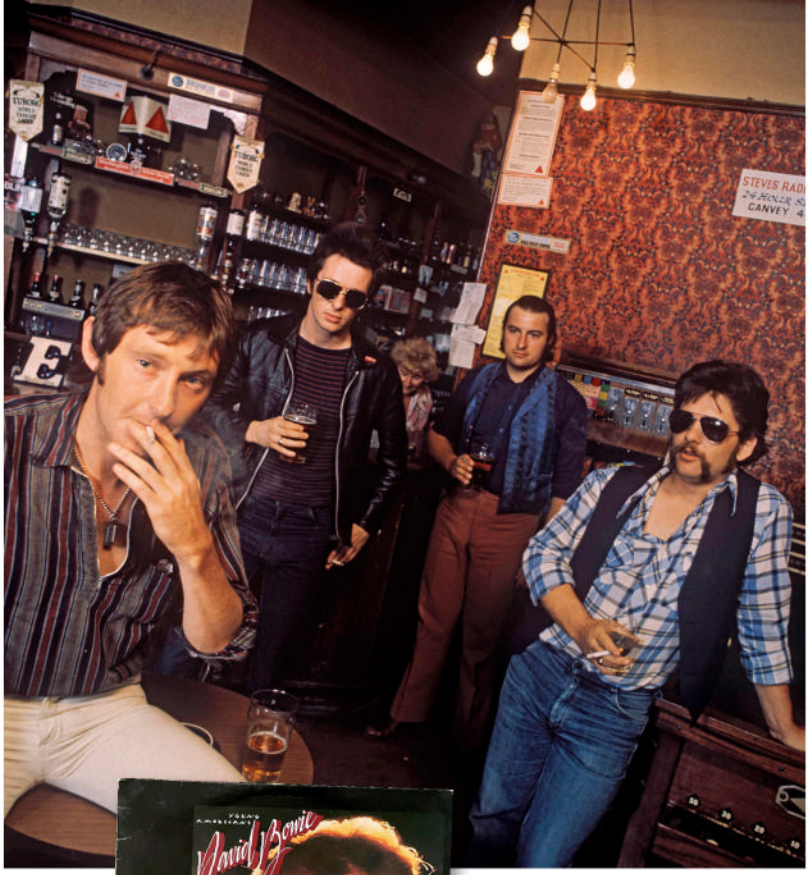
PHILIPPINES SINGLES AUGUST 8

1. **FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE** JACK JONES KAPP
2. **WHAT'D I SAY** ELVIS PRESLEY RCA VICTOR
3. **IF EVER I WOULD LEAVE YOU** ROBERT GOULET COLUMBIA
4. **C'MON EVERYBODY** ELVIS PRESLEY RCA VICTOR
5. **MONEY** THE ASTRONAUTS RCA VICTOR
6. **LOSING YOU** DORIS DAY COLUMBIA
7. **ROLL OVER BEETHOVEN** THE BEATLES PARLOPHONE
8. **SUSPICION** ELVIS PRESLEY RCA VICTOR
9. **I WISH YOU LOVE** ROBERT GOULET COLUMBIA
10. **CIELITO LINDO** TRINI LOPEZ REPRISE

Lost in music: Doris Day at Number 6.

AD ARCHIVE 1964

John Coltrane Quartet drummer Elvin Jones shows off his Gretsch Black Pearl kit. Reputably he swung so hard, they had to nail it to the floor.



Vocal hero: (clockwise from top left) Sammy Davis Jr. (with Lionel Blair, left) sang over the Hawaii 5-0 theme; ciggy stardust: Lee Brilleaux (far left) and Dr. Feelgood pose for the cover of 1977's *Be Seeing You*; Bowie's *Young Americans*; The Young Ones' Neil.

Who added new words to instrumentals?

Let us answer your nagging queries and settle any rock-related argument.

I was listening to Hugh Masekela's 1968 instrumental Grazing In The Grass and was then directed to a vocal version by The Friends Of Distinction, which was a US hit in 1969 – quite a disorientating experience. Who else added words to an existing song?

Chris Hendry, via e-mail

MOJO says: There are lots, one early example being Charlie Chaplin's Smile – originally the theme for his 1936 film Modern Times, the now-familiar words were added in 1954. It can be jarring when someone imposes a narrative on recognisable wordless evocations, as the following may demonstrate: The Shadows' Apache sung by Sonny James, Sammy Davis Jr.'s You Can Count On Me (a vocal version of the Hawaii 5-0 theme), Kathy Kirby's version of The Tijuana Brass's Spanish Flea, Magic Star by Kenny Hollywood (a version of The Tornados' Telstar), Pat Boone singing words to the movie theme for Exodus, Anarchic System putting a lyric to Hot Butter's Popcorn and Bryan Ferry rewriting The Smiths' Money Changes Everything as The Right Stuff. This was a phenomenon talked about by Fred Dellar, late of this page, who noted that new lyrics for jazz pieces was not uncommon. Jon Hendricks of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross fame did it multiple times on existing songs by Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk and more: when his words for Weather Report's Birdland were sung by The Manhattan Transfer in 1979, it won a Grammy. As we ask what are *your* favourite instros-turned-singalongs, let's turn things around by saying that Raymond Lefèvre's groovy '68 hit Soul Coaxing started life as Michel Polnareff's vocal piece Ame Câline.

Getty (3).

EVEN MORE BOOTS

Re: Ask MOJO 354 (on the subject of bootlegs being sold openly). It is assumed that every recording has an 'owner'. However, it's a fact that there are millions of so-called 'orphan works' without there being an established and properly documented ownership claim. The explosion of popular music in the 1960s and the advent of home recording led to a plethora of new orphan recordings. These often originated during international promotional trips where radio and TV appearances were recorded and broadcast willy-nilly. Never properly documented, the rights fell between stools. In the absence of paperwork it is impossible to establish ownership and is not economic to do so retrospectively.

Pete Lawton, www.tsmuk.com

THE WHEEZE CONTINUES

Re: Smoking on LP covers (Ask MOJO, 355). Back in 1977, Dr. Feelgood released two LPs in the same year (*Sneakin' Suspicion* and *Be Seeing You*), both of which have covers featuring the late Lee Brilleaux smoking. Lee re-enacted the *Sneakin' Suspicion* pic on the *Down At The Doctors* LP, alas his final live recordings (1994). Lastly, the band's *Looking Back* compilation box set (1995) came in, what else, but a king-sized fag packet, prior to the Oasis singles box sets with a similar packaging idea a year later.

Al Reid (a non-smoker), Musselburgh

MOJO says: Cheers, Al! And how can we forget the sleeve of Feelgood's 1981 live LP *On The Job*, which features a full, cigs-galore dustpan after the club's been swept up at the end of the night (when we get our full back-tattoo, that's the one to go for). And thanks to the readers who sent other tobacco-related cover suggestions, including Bowie's *Young Americans*, Nick Lowe's *The Convincer* and Marianne Faithfull's *Broken English*. And let's give it up for Michael Murphy, who entered the rare arena of 'pipe smoking on LP covers', naming Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown, Alan Hull and William Bell as stars of the genre.

NEIL NEIL ORANGE PEEL

Good to see early-'80s TV comedy represented in Ask MOJO (354). My contribution: did Neil the hippy from The Young Ones play with Marillion? It sounds too good to be true.

Andrew Craig, via e-mail

MOJO says: Nigel Planer's character Neil namechecked Marillion (and Hawkwind) in June 1984's Young Ones goodbye Summer Holiday, but he'd already supported Marillion at dates including the Friars Aylesbury in December 1983. There was clearly mutual admiration: Planer originally wanted Marillion to back him on his version of Traffic's Hole In My Shoe, which hit Number 2 in July '84, and that year he also received a thank you on the sleeve of the band's *Fugazi* LP. Then in 1986 Planer played Castle Donington as a member of Bad News, the UK's answer to Spinal Tap, who were joshingly described by Marillion's Fish as, "an insult… a disgrace… a heavy metal Sheena Easton."

HELP MOJO

I've found myself arguing that drum'n'bass was invented when hip-hop records were played at 45 rather than 33, but I'm not sure where I heard it. Is it true?

Simon Davies, via e-mail

MOJO says: Good question. And, was big beat trip-hop played too fast? Was Belgian new beat created after DJs played records too slow (apparently so)? And what records sound better when played at the wrong speed? Let us know your thoughts!

CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.

Bright Ears

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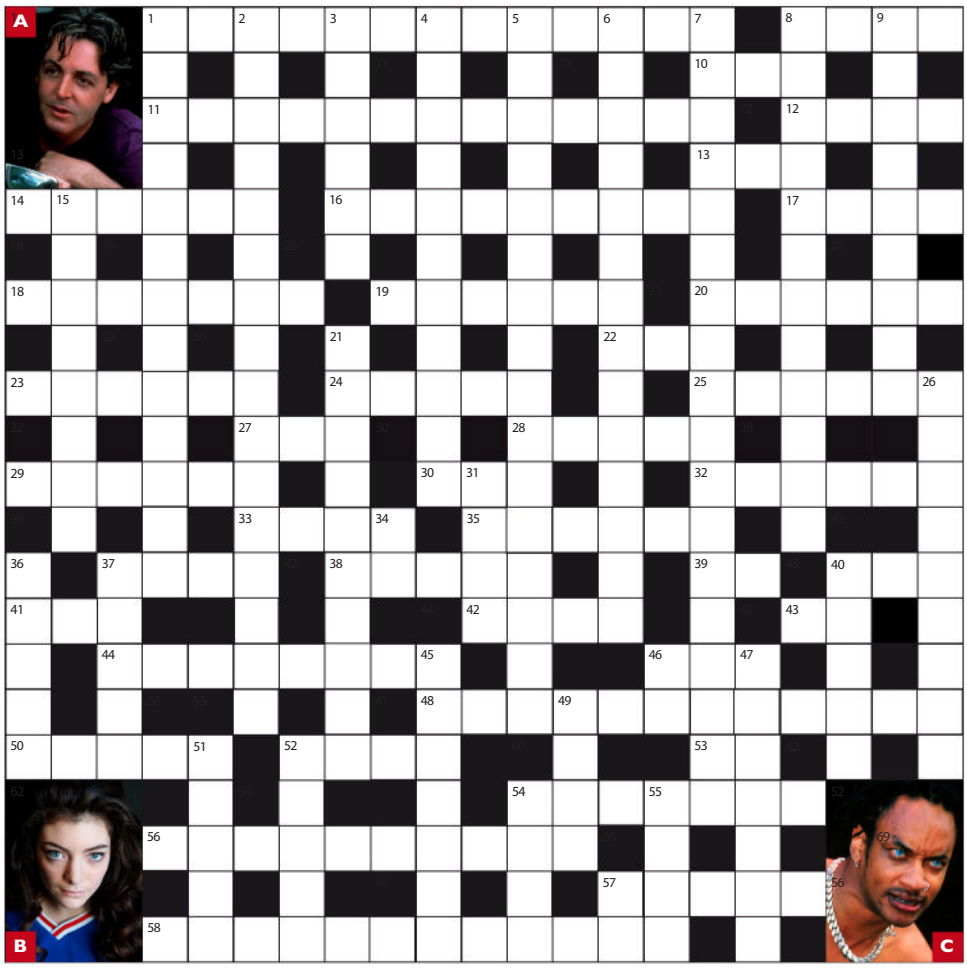
ANSWERS

MOJO 356

Across: 1 Duane Allman, 6 USA, 9 Watch The Corners, 10 Clouds, 12 Banana Splits, 15 Gold, 16 Heathen, 17 Shagpile, 18 Eye, 20 Fear, 21 Chris Martin, 23 RAH, 24 Sonia, 25 Scala, 27 Earworm, 29 Amor, 30 Siren, 31 Ween, 32 Roebuck, 33 Elegy, 35 Ow, 36 Dory, 38 Asp, 39 Vern, 42 One, 43 Ravens, 44 WC, 45 Mattel, 48 Sabaton, 50 Hundred, 52 Ed Rak, 55 Peni, 56 Oasis, 58 Enola Gay, 61 Deri, 63 GN, 64 Alan Stewart, 65 Dreams, 66 Ada, 67 Us.

Down: 1 Downunder, 2 Art Is The, 3 Echo Beach, 4 Lee Mavers, 5 Atonal, 7 Surfing On Sine Waves, 8 Snapshots From, 11 Loose Screw, 13 Sniff N The Tears, 14 Sheila E, 19 Palm Skin, 21 Cherry Vanilla, 22 Rare Earth, 23 Ram, 26 Landscape, 28 Opus, 31 Woods, 34 Yes, 37 Op, 38 AWB, 40 ET, 41 Neural, 45 Mono, 46 LN, 47 Adored, 49 Tenor, 51 Reds, 53 Diary, 54 Kinks, 57 Aiwa, 59 Gas, 60 Yaz, 62 ETA.

Winner: David Hartland of **Gloucester** wins an Audio Pro C5 MkII speaker and a 12-month Qobuz music subscription.



Getty (3)

ACROSS

1 See photoclue A (4,9)
8 Antônio Carlos Jobim by the sea in '70 (4)
10 The Jackson 5's second Number One (3)
11 Richie Havens song later covered by Brian Auger, Julie Driscoll & The Trinity (6,4,3)
12 Johnny Thunders' Heartbreakers' only studio album (1,1,1,1)
13 Slam poet Tempest (3)
14 Emotions In Motion rocker Billy (6)
16 What jazz players do? (9)
17 Fleetwood Mac's follow-up to *Rumours* (4)
18 Andy Cabic's freak folkers (7)
19 Truckers, Bear or Love Songs (6)
20 Oren Ambarchi defies the gods? (6)
22 Listen To The Buddha, they said in '76 (3)
23 Matchbox Twenty, feeling peaky in 2003 (6)
24 The pre-Queen beam? (5)
25 Clock DVA, parched in '81 (6)
27 --- Static (3)
28 An uninterrupted transition from song into another (5)
29 The Velvet Underground's song of addiction (6)
30 Initially, Shades Of Rhythm's label (1,1,1)
32 Neon, Harbour or City illuminations? (6)
33 Depth Charge score with an ode to Brazilian football (4)
35 AKA a cherry-picking compilation (4,2)
37 A coin-operated Uwe Schmidt alias? (4)
38 White Punks On Dope rockers (5)
39 The Who's John Entwistle's bovine alter-ego The -- (2)
40 The Upsetters' was Super (3)
41 Joanne Brackeen, stern in '78? (3)
42 ---- *For Life* (Lana Del Rey) (4)
43 Derek Taylor did this job for The Byrds, The Beatles and The Beach Boys (1,1)
44 Tom Waits' 1985 LP (4,4)
46 Autechre did four *Sessions* for them (3)
48 US vocal group who hit big with 26 Miles (Santa Catalina) and Big Man (3,4,5)
50 Marc Bolan was its Guru (5)
52 Their biggest hit was Whip It (4)
53 For Elliott Smith, it could be *Either*, could be this (2)
54 Johnny Kidd's swashbuckling backing band (7)
56 Material and Nona Hendryx break free (7,3)
57 See photoclue B (5)
58 Where Just-Ice went back to in '86 (3,3,6)

DOWN

1 Mick Jagger's second solo LP (9,4)
2 Wayne Smith's dancehall classic of '85 (5,2,5,4)
3 Art Blakey's hard bop classic of '59 (6)
4 The original Blue Suede Shoes man (4,7)
5 Les Savy Fav's roguish CV (10,6)
6 Micky Moonshine's Northern soul oldie (4,2,3,3,2)
7 Wilco's opus, title inspired by secret "numbers stations" (6,5,7)
8 Psych band named for a Cambridge archaeologist and parapsychologist (1,1,10)
9 Purveyors of 'East Anglian Hardcore', The --------- (9)
15 Grand Funk Railroad go apicultural (5,3)
21 Squeeze's death of romance? (2,4,4)
26 "It's loud and it's --------- and I've heard it before" (Bowie, Fashion) (9)
31 Danish voice Agnes ---- (4)
34 PiL's Mr Edmonds (2)
36 See photoclue C (5)
37 Shorthand for a Fender guitar (5)
40 Pink, Bender or Kalma (5)
45 Iggy's band (7)
46 -Mark, Shooz or Colours (2)
47 Stone Roses '94 comeback single, Love ------- (7)
49 Martin Green's album with Aidan Moffat, Karine Polwart, Adrian Utley (4)
51 Terry Hall, amused in 1997 (5)
52 The Gossip's Beth ----- (5)
54 A big-selling debut from Bros (4)
55 Where are UK Subs band? (1,1,1,1)

Stand by Ure man: Thin Lizzy (from left) Midge, Brian Downey, Phil Lynott and Scott Gorham in the vortex of the whirlwind, 1979.

Midge Ure and Thin Lizzy

It began with 24 hours' notice. And ended when the day job with Ultravox called.

HELLO JULY 18, 1979

I already knew Philip [Lynott, Thin Lizzy frontman]. I saw Thin Lizzy playing at the Picasso club in Glasgow [in 1971], and I met him again when they played Glasgow Uni, wandering the streets – my mum made him egg and chips. When I moved to London to join the Rich Kids, we bumped into each other again.

I'd just put together Visage, and I'd just joined Ultravox. I was in Martin Rushent's studio [in Reading] when I got a phone call, quite late. It was Phil's management saying, "Phil is going to call you in 10 minutes." I had no idea what it was about. And he comes on and says, "Gary [Moore] is out of the band, we've got another three weeks of this US tour opening up for Journey, playing sports megadomes. Can you come out tomorrow and finish the tour?"

Why he thought I was capable of that I'll never know. I was about to say, "You've got the wrong guy", and then I thought, Don't be stupid, this could be fantastic. So I said, "Yeah, of course." I thought, I can learn all the songs on the way over, but because they flew me on Concorde, which only took three hours, by the time I got there I had just two or three song arrangements in my head. The next night I was on-stage in New Orleans.

"It was petrifying. But the adrenaline gets you through."
MIDGE URE

It was petrifying. But the adrenaline gets you through. This is in the vortex of a whirlwind, you know, just crazy. They're all in the fluffy shirts and leather trousers and I walk on-stage in my New Romantic padded shoulder outfit with bright yellow trousers and make-up – they didn't flinch! I found out a few years ago that Phil convinced the guys that I knew all the songs already, which of course I didn't.

Flying from gig to gig, limos, hotel suites… everything was new and shiny and wonderful. There was a picture of Scott [Gorham, guitarist], Phil and I in swimming trunks by a pool, and I said, "Wow, this is the life", and Phil and Scott turned to me and said, "It's fucking Shreveport, Louisiana, you're in a motel." I'm thinking, I'm with Thin Lizzy, in America, this is glorious!

GOODBYE APRIL 1980

I was anticipating three weeks in America, then back to finishing the Visage and Ultravox albums. Then they said, "We want to take [guitarist Dave Flett] to Japan and we want you to be there to bring in some keyboards, but then jump down and do the last half dozen songs on guitar." After that, they said, "Now we want to try out [guitarist] Snowy White in Ireland," and they asked me to do the same thing again.

The Irish dates were bizarre, in a brilliant way. You were playing town halls or a scout hut in the middle of nowhere. The last date might have been Cork City Hall – I remember hitting these synthesizers which nobody could hear, and lots of long-haired lads down the front gesticulating wildly at me, until I came down and played Whiskey In The Jar, and all of a sudden I'd gone from being a wanker to being the absolute god of the night. After that, it was, "I've got to go."

We still used to hang out and we did a few things over the years. Both Bob Geldof and I were his mates and the big sorrow was that we never asked him to re-form Lizzy for Band Aid, and we should have done.

The last time I saw Phil, it would have been at a party after one of the Ultravox London shows. He wasn't in a great state, he'd kind of bloated a bit. There was always a drama around Phil – he'd been in a fight, it was going to be the last tour, he was lined up to play Hendrix in a movie. It was all a scam, most of it. So, when you hear that he's been hospitalised… you're like, Phil's had a bit too much or whatever, he'll be fine. We all expected it to be a ruse, and when it wasn't, it was a shock [Lynott passed away on January 4, 1986].

I'm still in touch with his kids and [widow] Caroline. The association is still strong. [The current] Thin Lizzy have asked me to do a couple of things and very lovingly call me part of the Lizzy family. I cherish my association with them because it was what you dream of as a spotty 18-year-old – just standing on-stage with those guys playing those tunes. That experience was immense.

As told to Ian Harrison

Midge presents Celebrating 7 Decades: A Life In Music at the Royal Albert Hall on October 4, 2023.

"That experience was immense": Phil, Gaye Advert and Ure, '79; (left) Midge today.

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